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Psychological Contracts in Coaching

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies

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Abstract

The research sets out to explore the influence of the coach's unconscious mind on the coaching process and to answer the question, *How does the coach's unconscious mind influence the coaching process?*

This research is based on the psychodynamic concept that the unconscious mind is omnipresent and has a strong influence on thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and sought to ascertain the extent to which the coach's unconscious mind is at work in the coaching process. Brunning (2006) suggests that the term psychodynamic links *psycho* (from the *psyche* Greek meaning soul or mind) and *dynamic* (from the Greek *dynamis*, meaning strength or power). Thus, psychodynamic work is based on ways of understanding how the mental forces operating intrapersonally and interpersonally in and between individuals and groups affect their thinking and behaviour.

It involves eight participants, all of whom are professionally trained and accredited coaches, working in the public sector in Scotland as either internal or external coaches. The research invited participants to explore their lived experience in relation to the intrapersonal process; the interpersonal process, relationships with parties to the coaching contract and the coaching process. The data collection followed three distinct yet inter-related stages, engaging participants in semi-structured interviews using metaphor, symbolic representation and creation of metaphoric landscapes, culminating in indirect observation of the coach at work.

The narrative is a journey of discovery for both the researcher and the participants, with data emerging that identifies the coach's relationship not only with the external parties but also with the different parts of self. In the three stages of this journey, the participants travel from mental activity, reflecting on lived experience, perceptions and events, to the exploration of mental process and constructs which are inferred, discovered and translated into conscious awareness throughout the research interviews.

The professional significance of this research is the consideration of where the need for psychological awareness sits within the context of professional coach education and accreditation, which moves the coach beyond technique to psychological understanding, self-awareness and self-regulation.

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I would not have had a project to work on had it not been for those client organisations that were prepared to partner with me in this research. I am grateful to the coaches, both internal and external, and to those client organisations who gave considerable time, energy and enthusiasm to participating in the research. To the coaches, thank you for your willingness to allow me to step into your inner world and join you in the exploration of that world.

I must thank my long-suffering husband, who encouraged me to keep going when I was ready to give up and for the hours I spent at my computer, enforcing solitude on him.

Finally, to those authors who introduced me to the concept of the unconscious mind, I am eternally grateful. Your work has stretched my mind, developed my sense of self and enriched my professional practice.

'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.' Jung (1991).

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Chapter One: Context for the Research

Introduction

Coaching has grown as a profession in the last 15 years, resulting in the development of qualifications for coaches and accreditation by professional associations of coach training programmes. The focus on training and accreditation tends towards the development of technical skills, with less attention being paid to self-awareness and self-regulation.

The role of coaching in organisations has evolved from its roots as the organisation's agent of performance mediation to the present focus on releasing potential through professional/personal development plans.

Many executives take up coaching as a means to better understand themselves. My view is that coaches, like psychotherapists and counsellors, help bring about important changes for individuals, groups and organisations. Consequently, their clients may be in a life situation which renders them vulnerable and possibly dependent. I would argue that it is these occupational conditions that demand from the coach not only a high degree of professional competence and ethical awareness, but also a level of psychological understanding, a high degree of self-awareness and the capacity to self-regulate.

The work of coaches can not only deeply influence their immediate client but impact other people and relationships. Thus, it is the individual coach's professional competence, self-awareness and self-regulation that are critical to the protection of the clients in their care.

Professional background and emerging research question

As part of previous assignments for my professional doctorate, I have reflected in depth on my personal and professional journey, including through the Advanced Professional Practice (RAL 4 & 5) claims. Noting that the reader may not have had access to these previous assignments, it may be useful at this stage to give an overview of my work, my professional learning and my qualifications. I will also highlight the critical incidents that led me to choosing this research topic for the professional doctorate.

I was born into and brought up in a Scottish working class family steeped in the belief that I should know my place and not get above my station. This is part of my story and from time to time, it may emerge and get in the way of me owning my competence and my credibility as a professional. I was the first person in my family to enter a professional role

and the first family member to enter into any form of higher education. I was poorly educated at school, but once I took control of my own learning, my thirst for, and enjoyment of, education and learning grew and continues to do so.

My professional life started in the world of industrial relations management with a global drinks company. I was lucky to work for an organisation that invested heavily in the development of employees, and as I moved through the organisational hierarchy, from Industrial Relations Manager to Learning & Development Manager UK Operations, I was offered numerous opportunities for professional development. Amongst these were a postgraduate qualification in Personnel Management, a BA in Occupational Psychology and a Diploma in Organisation Development from Harvard Business School. These opportunities made significant contributions to my development both personally and professionally. In 1993 I was given the opportunity to train as an Inner Game coach with Tim Galwey, and this development captured my head and my heart. From start to finish, that programme engendered in me a belief in and a passion for coaching that has never left me.

I left corporate life in 1994 and set up my own small, niche organisation development consultancy business and as part of this, started offering my services as a coach. For the past 12 years, my focus has been on supporting organisations to develop a coaching culture that includes designing coaching strategy, creating governance frameworks for coaching, teaching coaching to those who want to be professional coaches, teaching foundation coaching skills to managers, supervising coaches and teaching supervision to coaches who want to offer supervision as part of their professional practice. I also still offer my services as a coach. I run an International Coach Federation (ICF) accredited coach training programme in Scotland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This programme is also accredited at Advanced Diploma Level by the Association for Coaching. Most of my shorter programmes carry ICF continuing coach education credentials. I, therefore, have a strong interest in the work of coaches, their professional framework and their professional development journey.

As my coaching business grew and I developed my range, my offer, and my framework for coaching, I realised I wanted to work with clients at a deeper level. I wanted to help individuals move beyond surfacing the limiting beliefs that stopped them achieving their potential to helping them understand how those limiting beliefs have been formed in the first place and how they manifest themselves behaviourally. I believed that with better understanding, clients could make the changes they wanted to make.

I was interested in some form of applied psychology but did not want to undertake another psychology degree; I was looking for something that allowed for practical application. I found, or rather, re-found Transactional Analysis (TA), having been introduced to the basic concepts on a training programme in the early 1980s. I started training as a Transactional Analyst in October 1998 with two outcomes in mind. The first of these was to develop my competence in the areas of social psychology, interpersonal communication and the intrapersonal process. I wanted to understand the impact of the behavioural manifestations of personality on individuals and their effectiveness in professional settings. The second outcome was to continue my journey of self-discovery, to understand my own unconscious process and how this affected my capacity to be fully present in the here and now. The journey to qualification as a Transactional Analyst is a long and arduous one, taking four to five years from the start of training to being ready to conduct a critical ethnography research project which is assessed and forms the basis for the student's oral examination. This took me to the stage one qualification of Certified Transactional Analyst (Organisational Field).

This journey of self-discovery prompted me to continue training and to move to stages two and three of the TA exam process. In 2004, following a three-day assessment centre, I was accredited as a Provisional Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst (Organisational Field), and in 2009, following three oral exams, including assessment of training design/delivery, supervision theory and practice, I was accredited as a Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst (Organisational Field). From the learning, I have had in my life, I believe that training in TA has had the most profound effect on who I am as a human being and how I work as a professional.

In 2005, I decided to update my knowledge and competence in coaching and undertook an ICF accredited coach training programme with Coaching Development. I followed this with a one-year training programme with the i-Coach Academy in 2006, and this allowed me to access to the Middlesex University Professional Doctorate programme. At this stage, I knew I wanted to do a piece of research that would contribute to the development of the coaching profession, but I had no clear idea what that research might be. In 2009, I gained the International Coach Federation (ICF) Professional Certified Coach credential and in 2011, the Master Coach Credential from the same professional body. Thus, I have been able to combine my passion for coaching with my passion for transactional analysis.

The critical incidents that led me to choose the research topic are aligned with my involvement in the professional assessment of coaches and with teaching and supervising TA students.

I notice that the competences that coaches have the most difficulty achieving are:

- Coaching presence
- Direct communication
- Creating awareness

I supervise coaches and work as a mentor for coaches who are seeking to gain an ICF accreditation. In both these contexts, I have noticed that the main challenges faced by these professionals are the same three competences. This suggests that before and after accreditation, the coach still has difficulty with these three competences. Noticing this, I reflected on the assessment and credentialing process for coaches and considered that this needs to be more robust. Currently, the ICF accreditation process uses a multiple incident, single format assessment methodology, whereas I believe that multiple incident, multiple format assessment is more likely to allow for accurate assessment of the coach's competence.

I teach and supervise trainees in the organisational application of TA and, although not all this group are involved in coaching, I have noticed a theme around what blocks them in their work. I can see similarities, in the sense that they are often challenged to be fully present in their work; they avoid the use of direct communication, leaving things unsaid in the relationship, and they seem to get stuck in supporting their clients to be more self-aware.

This fed my curiosity and raises the question, 'What is getting in the way?' I wondered about the extent to which failure to notice or understand their own process may be interfering with their work.

Research question and theoretical perspective

I work with theoretical perspectives relating the omnipresence of the unconscious mind and my interest is the extent to which the unconscious takes over and, in some shape or form, influences the interpersonal process in all relationships. Set in the context of coaching, my curiosity is, 'Will the coach's unconscious mind take over in some shape or form and influence the coaching process?' This curiosity is the basis for the formulation of the research question – *'How does the coach's unconscious mind influence the coaching process?'*

The primary objective is to heighten awareness of and sensitivity to unconscious processes and how these influence the coaching process. In pursuit of the primary

objective, a second objective is met, that is, to ascertain how the coach's work may be influenced by the coalescence of organisational, relational and psychodynamic influences. The final objective is to reflect on the research findings and to consider the ways in which these can inform the ongoing education and professional development of this community of practice.

In determining the research question and identifying the objectives, I was mindful of considering who the audience for the research outcomes would be. I thought it important to consider the implications for the learning partners, being mindful of their willingness to support the research and the resource they would invest in the project. I contracted with them for the outcomes they expected to get and for how we would deal with the implications for them that might arise as a result of the research. They placed no expectations on me and what we agreed was that I would share the outcomes of the research and together we would consider the implications for the development of their internal coaches as well as any system implications that might be worthy of consideration.

Turning my attention to the profession, I decided that the audience is the whole professional coaching community. My aspiration at the start of the research project was to be able to offer something to trainee coaches, qualified coaches, coach supervisors, coach educators, coaching authors and the professional coaching bodies. On reflecting on when I started this journey, I recall being somewhat scared of setting myself to fail and started fretting about what I could possibly offer such a diverse group of professionals. Supervision on this topic encouraged me to be bold in my assertion that I had something to offer and to trust that there would be learning for everyone who was interested in hearing the outcomes of the research. I will return to this theme in Chapter Seven.

The theoretical models used in the analysis of the research findings are discussed in detail Chapter Two so, suffice to mention here, the basis for the research is the psychodynamic approach. In this introduction, I will write more generally about psychodynamic concepts. There are different theoretical formulations about the development and structure of personality and this research focussed primarily on the relationship between people as well as the relationship between different parts of the individual, where internalised and fantasised representations play an important part of an individual's make-up.

Working from any psychodynamic perspective, there is an underlying belief that the unconscious is dynamic and, therefore, purposeful. Consequently, it is a source of motivation for our behaviour, feelings and fantasies, rather than just something we are unaware of. It is often unconscious memories, beliefs, feelings and fantasies that have the

most profound effect on the way we experience the world around us. Our actions and conscious beliefs are largely driven by our attempts to keep uncomfortable truths from our conscious awareness. The word 'dynamic' describes movement or, as some writers have described it, 'turbulence' (Leiper & Maltby, 2004) and it implies that our inner world is not static. Turbulence is a normal aspect of psychological functioning. The strength and amount of turbulence varies, however, according to how much pressure we are under at any given moment. The pressure can come from internal or external sources. Internal sources are our instinctual needs, memories, fantasies, beliefs and wishes, our relationship to ourselves and important others in our minds. External sources are events or relationships in the outer world that affect us. The internal world is like that of a 'lava' lamp, in which coloured convection currents are in perpetual and ever-changing movement in relation to one another. The amount of movement in the lamp is determined by the amount of heat in the system. The level of turbulence in our inner world is determined by the amount of psychological 'heat' being generated from our inner world and from the external world of relationships.

We experience these convection currents as a clash or conflict, and the notion of conflict and the pain it causes is a central idea in psychodynamic models. These models view the experience of being human as an inherently uncomfortable one. We must constantly reconcile the tension between the things we want for ourselves, the demands of living and working with others in groups and what is possible. We must make ongoing adjustments and compromises to the changes in our external world. We also have our own set of guiding principles informing who we believe we are in the world and how we should live our lives.

Psychodynamic models suggest we find ways of coping with the inherent discomfort of the human condition and the conflict it causes so as not to become overwhelmed. Our means of coping are called defences and we use these consciously and deliberately. The psychodynamic models are particularly interested in those defences that we deploy unconsciously. We need defences to function in the world, so the aim is not to eliminate them. That would be both unwise and impossible. Rather, we should bring them into awareness and thus make choices. With this in mind, my interest is in exploring the inner world of the coach as it functions in the coaching process.

The context for my project is coaching in the public sector in Scotland, with a focus on the National Health Service. The stakeholders are two large NHS Boards, NHS Tayside and NHS Forth Valley. I have worked with these organisations on the development and implementation of coaching strategy. The nature of the work I have done with these organisations was seeking to bring about cultural change. I am aware that my experiences

of them may have shaped and influenced both consciously and unconsciously how I engaged in the research process.

The research takes a deeper look at how the constituent parts of the coaching relationship are experienced through the lens of the coach and how this may influence the coaching process. An outline of the proposed research was summarised in a paper sent out with an email from those organisations inviting participants to sign up for the research. It can be found in Appendix 1.

I believe the data from some research potentially leads to disconfirmation, resulting in discomfort and disequilibrium. The last thing I wanted to do in this research was to create anxiety or guilt in the system and so the emergent findings are presented in a psychologically safe way. The scene was set for this through a lengthy and detailed discussion process, resulting in a formal contract (see Appendix 2), with the stakeholder representatives of each organisation, working with the notion that we could each learn something new from the work without loss of identity or integrity.

I have taken a simple approach to constructing the thesis, with a total of seven chapters. I best understand text when it follows what is for me a natural flow, and my own preferences have influenced the structure of my text. I have sought to contextualise the research whilst, at the same time, seeking to capture the interest and imagination of the reader.

From coach to researcher

My journey as a researcher has been a parallel process to coaching. When a coach works with a client, they are locked in relational dialogue, constantly searching for meaning. In coaching, the client arrives with a desire to tell their story to achieve clarity and find a way forward in their life. I believe it is not just the story that is important, but rather their interpretation of it; they are looking to understand the significance and meaning of their story. The gift the research participants gave me was an insight into how important it was for them to understand the significance and meaning of their story. Reflecting on my own process and learning from this, I have gained a deeper insight into understanding the significance and meaning of my story in the context of being a DProf researcher.

'Perhaps we'll never know how far the path can go, how much a human being can truly achieve, until we realize that the ultimate reward is not a gold medal but the path itself.' (Leonard, 1991, p.110)

This quote summarises my learning journey: researching, analysing and writing this thesis has been the reward.

Summary

This chapter has sought to introduce the reader to me as a professional, to the project and to the research question as a contextualised issue. In the next chapter, I will introduce the reader to the literature and theoretical perspectives that have influenced the work.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the core theories that have generated my curiosity in the research question and the foundation on which I sought to make sense of the emergent data. Having reviewed the respective theories, I conclude by critiquing the theories and challenging the assumptions I see inherent in both the psychodynamic models and the coaching literature reviewed.

The psychodynamic approach

Much has been written on the psychodynamic approach to coaching, with a focus on the use of models in the coaching process. A central goal of this approach is to make the unconscious conscious, to become more self-aware and understand more about how we think, feel and behave. For me, this leads to the question, '*What psychological awareness might the coach need to have to continually raise their awareness of how their unconscious mind may be influencing the work?*' In the absence of literature focussing on the coach and intrapsychic process, I was curious to understand how the coach works on self-assessment, critical self-reflection and self-management to keep their process clean. In Transactional Analysis (TA), the practitioner is required to use the theory to understand self and critically reflect on practitioner/client interaction through the supervisory process. Research conducted by the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy shows that the process is similar in other psychodynamic modalities (www.bacp.co.uk).

Freud believed that behaviour could be understood if only we looked closely enough. Central to Freud's viewpoint is that we rarely deal directly with external reality, rather we interact with the world based on internal representations. According to Czander (1993), we see the world in terms of internal concerns. In the psychodynamic view, behaviour is the result of the interplay of conflicting internal forces. If we look at the core theories of the various approaches, we can postulate that if these apply to the coaching client, then they must also apply to the coach. Bachkirova (2011) offers a significant contribution to the development of both the coaching profession in introducing the three stories of self and the role of the unconscious mind. This work challenged my thinking and theoretical frame of reference and offered me an alternative way of looking at the development of self. Apart from Bachkirova's text and the work of Kets de Vries (2006) and De Haan (2008, 2016), I found a dearth of literature focussing on the coach's internal processes. Lee (2010), in writing about the psychodynamic approach to coaching, states that this approach

challenges coaches to stretch their own capacity for creating meaning. My intention in underpinning my research with this theory was to stretch both my own and the participants' capacity to make meaning of their experience. I have reviewed the literature by putting a focus on the core themes of the psychodynamic approach and worked with these in the process of the data analysis.

Adaptation

Kets de Vries (1991) offers the idea that to avoid feelings of inferiority, we take on the identity of the organisation and become 'company men or women', which causes us to give up our own values and independent judgement. This raises the question of how coaches may over-adapt or over-identify with the organisation they are working with.

Psychodynamic thinking is developmental and, as such, it can help set goals for growth. Levinson (1996) identifies the predictable stages of development and identifies several qualities associated with healthy development. I connected this model to Berne's (1966) therapeutic operations. This provided me with a framework for understanding the research participants and how their unconscious process may have been influencing their lived experiences as coaches.

Defence mechanisms

We use defence mechanisms to distort or deny reality and avoid exposure to hurt or harm. In Transactional Analysis, the child ego state feels the authentic scare response and the person defaults unconsciously to old patterns from either the child or parent ego state to protect the self. Scare or anxiety is a signal that we are struggling to control our primitive urges and we use defence mechanisms to keep threatening feelings and painful thoughts outside of our awareness. We distort reality to protect our sense of self (Berne, 1966; Mellor & Schiff, 1980). Defence mechanisms smooth out the emotional bumps in the road we travel and have their uses unless they become extreme or habitual. Peltier (2009) suggests that the alert coach can spot the use of the following defence mechanisms:

- Adaptation
- Denial
- Distortion of reality
- Causes of strange behaviour.

It was helpful to understand these defence mechanisms in the context of the data collection for the research, particularly as the research participants were invited to step

into their inner world. Peltier (2009) suggests that there are two ways that such an understanding can be useful in coaching. In the first place, the coach must be able to recognise the use of defences in the client and decide whether to call attention to them or to simply integrate them into the overall understanding of the client. The second use is in teaching clients to observe this behaviour in others. This presupposes that the coach is aware of their own defence mechanisms and the extent to which these may influence their practice. Freud (1951) suggests that one cannot simply 'look in the mirror' to discover these things. A second, impartial party is required, and in the case of the coach, this is likely to be the Supervisor

Fantasy

Czander (1993) states that fantasy is important to psychodynamic theory and suggests that we have an idealised notion of who and what we are in the world of work (this is called the 'ego ideal'), which is often fantastic. In most cases, the workplace cannot fully service our fantasies given the nature of hierarchical organisations. Peltier (2009) suggests on this basis that few make it to the top and few can sustain the status of being a rising star. The rest are disappointed and experience psychic conflict, which is rarely discussed openly or directly, and it manifests in frustrating, disguised and camouflaged forms.

Berne (1963) developed the concept of public and private structure of organisations and groups, suggesting we are drawn to an organisation or group through what we see from the outside and we develop a fantasy of what it would be like to be part of it. We join any system with a preconscious expectation based on the myths, fantasies and beliefs we hold about ourselves in relation to others and our lived experience of being a part of systems. In writing about the private structure, Berne coined the term group imago, which he defined as a mental picture of what a group is or should be like. Group imago is a mental construct, unique to the individual, which changes over time, in the face of confronting reality. It is part of the individual's inner world and, as such, is influenced by past experiences, myths, fantasies, expectations and beliefs about the self, others and the world generally. The imago is reviewed and reframed as the individual engages in the interpersonal process.

These concepts have fuelled my interest that fantasy may be part of the coach's unconscious process.

Jungian (analytical) psychology

'Analytical psychology' is the term that Jung (1991) gave to his form of psychotherapy. Fundamental to his view of the psyche was the mind and the 'unconscious' could largely be trusted and all the time, it was attempting to self-regulate to assist the individual. Jung's terms of individuation, archetype, extraversion and introversion are based on the psychological model of the relations between the conscious and the unconscious mind. Coaches often work with clients to help them become conscious of their unconscious thinking processes and how these impact on their behaviour. If coaches are doing this work with clients, what personal work do they need to do to become aware of their own unconscious thinking processes and how these influence their work?

Social defences

Jacques (1953) proposed that one of the primary cohesive elements binding individuals into institutionalised human association was defence against anxiety. Within social structures, including organisations, individuals and groups take up unconscious as well as conscious roles. Jacques gives the example of the First Officer of a ship who is regarded by common consent 'as the source of all trouble' for everything that goes wrong. This allows the ship's Captain, on whom all lives depend, to be idealised as the reliable protector. Here, the whole social system of the ship's crew is about using the defences of splitting into all good or all bad and projection. Thus, all badness and weakness are projected onto the First Officer and all goodness, strength and knowledge are projected onto the Captain. These defences enable the crew to feel they are in safe hands, protecting them from the reality that the Captain is not omnipotent. I think there is a possibility that, in times of change, the coach is perceived as all that is good in the system.

Jacques (1953) states defence mechanisms are not exclusively intrapersonal. Organisations, systems and teams/groups use them as well, and for the same ends – to manage threat and anxiety. They use them to reduce uncertainty and to handle uncomfortable feelings. Diamond (1993) suggests that corporate culture is organised to protect against uncomfortable feelings. This raises the question of the extent to which the coach's experience of the organisation influences their work.

Systemic roles

Family systems theory is a body of knowledge that has arisen out of the observations of clinical and counseling psychologists as they work with individuals and their families

(Bowen, 1974; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The theory suggests individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another; families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system. The writings of Guerin (1976, 1987), Carter and McGoldrick (1980, 1988), Lerner (1983, 1988, 1990 and 1993) and Schnarch (1991, 1997) have Bowenian Theory at the heart of their conceptualisations.

The family role is that which is expected of each member, the most basic being the father, mother, aunt, daughter, son and grandmother. Each of these roles carries expectations, some of which are spoken and others which are not. Alongside these basic roles are the underlying roles which individuals take up in their family system, that is, the set of consistent expectations about behaviour and reactions. Blevins (1993) suggests that the role the individual adopts in the family is transferred to the workplace. These roles are taken on to accomplish something in response to organisational structure and the interpersonal system and have nothing to do with the individual's position in the formal system. The relevance of this theory to the research is to consider whether the coach's family role may get played out unconsciously in the coaching process.

In his work on family systems, Bowen (1974) introduces the theory of triangles. A triangle is a three-person relationship system. It is considered the building block or 'molecule' of larger emotional systems because a triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. A two-person system is unstable because it tolerates little tension before involving a third person. A triangle can contain much more tension without involving another person because the tension can shift around the three relationships. Micholt (1992) introduced the concept of psychological distance and described this as the perceived distance in terms of the relationship existing between the parties to the contract. In a healthy alliance, the relationships are equal, so, psychologically, the coach, the organisation and the coachee have matching degrees of closeness. Issues arise when any one of the parties feels that the relationships are unbalanced and that closeness exists between two of the parties to the perceived detriment of the third, resulting in tension. There are invariably at least three parties to the coaching contract and, thus, there is a need to explore the extent to which the coach can maintain equality in psychological distance between the parties or whether the coach's unconscious mind interferes with this.

The organisation in the mind

The concept of the 'the-organisation-in-the-mind' (Armstrong, 2005) suggests that everyone perceives in their head how activities and relationships are organised, structured and connected internally. This is an internal model, unique to the individual and part of

their inner world. It relies on the individual's experiences of their interactions, relationships and the activities they engage in and how these give rise to emotions, values and responses which may influence the individual in their professional role, either helpfully or adversely.

Armstrong proposes that the proper object of a psychodynamic approach to working with organisations is attention to, and interpretation of, emotional experience. Emotional experience is not just the property of the individual; rather, it is always a factor of the emotional experience of the organisation: what passes between members. The emotional experience of the organisation as a whole is a function of the interrelations between task, structure, culture and context. Constituents contribute individually to this experience according to the structure and function of their personality. There is an interrelated emotional experience of the organisation as a bounded entity which is both conscious and unconscious. The organisation in the mind refers not only to the constituent member's conscious or unconscious mental constructs of the organisation and the assumptions they make about the aim, task, authority, power and accountability., but also to the emotional resonances registered and present in the mind of the constituent member.

This is equivalent to Hirschhorn's phrase, 'the workplace within' (Hirschhorn, 1990). This raises the potential of an unconscious connection or disconnection between the inner world of the organisation and the inner world of the coach. Thus, we have a world within a world which can appear as a foreign object, an extension of the individual, or as a term to connect the individual coach to their context. Armstrong suggests that it may be denied, disowned, defended against and so on. The methodology employed in this research project sought to introduce the research participants to the world within a world and to seek to understand their lived experience of the organisation.

I connect this to the psychological level of the contract (Berne, 1966), that is, those aspects of the relationship, including beliefs and expectations, outside the awareness of the parties to the contract and, therefore, unspoken. Berne said the outcome of the contract is determined at the psychological level. The research participants were invited to step into their inner world and to consciously experience the organisation in the-mind as a concept in relation to their role as a coach in the system. In classical TA terms, they were invited to surface the unconscious fears, myths and fantasies which may be feeding the psychological level of the contract.

The unconscious

Freud (1951) contributed to the idea of the unconscious in stating that we do not know much of our own mental activity. More recent research by cognitive scientists has essentially confirmed the existence of unconscious psychological processes, so we know that the unconscious is real (Cramer, 2000). Making the unconscious conscious enables us to exercise conscious choice and make decisions in line with our values and our professional roles.

Transference and counter-transference

The concepts of transference and counter-transference have their roots in Freudian theory. The terms refer to those aspects of relationships shaped by preconceptions and transferred onto the actual relationship with a real person or group which limit, confine and sometimes distort the reality of that relationship. Whilst these concepts were originally defined in a psychotherapeutic context, they have credence in coaching. Transference can be used to refer to the coach's reactions to the coachee and some aspects of their world. It can also be used to describe the unconscious archaic images the coachee imposes on the person of the coach. Transference can apply to any piece of unconscious learning that is applied in a new context and its impact is tangible when it occurs in the current relationship. For example, the coachee relates to the coach as a parent or other authority figure. Counter-transference refers to the coach's unconscious reaction to the coachee's transference, which can take the form of feelings, thoughts, behaviours and bodily sensations evoked in the coach by the coachee.

Most contemporary views stress the ubiquitous presence of transference and counter-transference in all relationships (Hirschhorn, 1990; Whittle & Ozod, 2009). No one is neutral or free from assumptions or preconceptions; all perception comes through the lens of past experience, because of which the coach and coachee may tend to co-create situations that are familiar to them and re-enact the relationships and conflicts they are prepared to experience. In short, transference and counter-transference are ever present, irreducible aspects of every relationship. To think about transference and counter-transference is essentially to consider the nature of the relationship, the meaning each party has for the other. Obholzer (2006) suggests it is never irrelevant to question the presence of transference and counter-transference in a relationship.

An organisation is a mosaic of transferences (Armstrong, 2005); to begin with, of course, there are the myriad of individual transferences present in any system of relationships. Moreover, transferences are generated by the organisation's structure, which provides

levels of authority and status differentials, as well as a complex system of roles and relationships. Transference reactions are also generated by the organisation's culture, history, rituals, customs and norms as well as by the organisation's demands for performance, duty and task requirements. These reactions, some conscious but mostly unconscious, fuse, collide and explode into conflicts, promoting the use of defences and distortions. Sometimes they related the work at hand but more often are associated with some deeply buried covert experience or trauma that is triggered by and replicated within the organisational setting.

This theory is relevant to the coaching relationship and, equally, to the researcher/participant relationship.

Critique of the theory

As a Transactional Analyst and someone who works with psychodynamic models, I believe in the omnipresence of the dynamic between conscious and unconscious motivation, and will confess that critiquing models which I work with every day was more than a little challenging. I will start with a critique of Transactional Analysis. TA is a theory of personality that comprises theories of child development and psychopathology, which form the basis for a theory of psychotherapy. It is also a theory of communication for understanding groups and organisations (Berne, 1963, 1966). TA started as a psychotherapeutic tool but also has relevance for facilitating a deeper understanding of behaviours which affect relationships. Its roots are in psychoanalysis and cognitive behaviourist and humanist traditions, combining some principles of cognitive behaviourism and psychoanalytic insight '...within a humanist values system' (Clarkson & Gilbert, 1988, p.20). It is a truism to state that TA appears as a simple set of integrated theories which belies the complexity behind the theory. The development of various schools of TA post Berne and the resulting practices of these schools have made general evaluation challenging.

Berne sought scientific recognition for TA, though he argued that research and therapy should be separate endeavours. I think had the concept of reflexive research been around in Berne's time, he would have been more comfortable about linking the two. I say this because I think his reflective writing on the behavioural manifestations of the intrapersonal process is evidenced in both researchers' and practitioners' accounts. There have been many studies into the efficacy of TA between 1950 and 2016 and whilst there is a vast amount of material on TA and methods of application, much of the evidence of outcomes is largely anecdotal, generally consisting of subjective accounts by practitioners. Despite the publication of two research journals in the field of TA, *The Transactional Analysis*

Journal and *The International Journal of TA Research*, there is still a lack of empirical research. The TA community has grown significantly in the last three decades despite a lack of systemic evidence to support such growth. Berne (1980, p.244) claimed that TA is a 'systemic phenomenology which could usefully fill the gap in psychological theory'. I do not think that claim has been substantiated by those of us who have followed Berne through failing to provide evidence that TA is comprehensive at the theoretical level and effective at the applied level.

As with TA, the common criticism of other psychodynamic models is the lack of empirical evidence and an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence. As someone working with psychodynamic models, I have been accused of being a 'pseudo-scientist' and I think this is partly because psychodynamic approaches depend on the professional practitioners' subjective interpretation. It is hard to defend the somewhat determinist approach that childhood 'trauma' leads to abnormal behaviour in adulthood because purist psychodynamic practitioners ignore genetic factors, rewards (behaviourism) and thinking patterns (cognitive approach). I think it is fair to question the use of psychotherapeutic concepts in the coaching context. Generally speaking, these are models used by helping professionals who are helping to 'fix' people and generally work at a deep level on deconstruction and reconstruction of personality. I would argue, however, that applying the psychodynamic models to the observation of everyday experience offers a framework for understanding human behaviour and gives us believable explanations for our interactions.

With regard to coaching literature, I found that what I read made sense to me. Explanations of coaching psychology, the coaching process and the application of different approaches I found to be well written and they offered food for thought. With a few exceptions, namely Bachkirova (2011), Kets de Vries (2006) and De Haan (2008, 2016), the literature does not specifically challenge the coach to look at their own internal process. All the authors who write about the psychodynamic models do so with authority and give a good account of how coaches can work with these models in support of the client. The coaching literature focuses on the development of skills and use of models in support of the client. I read in much of the work an implicit assumption that the coach has taken responsibility for understanding their intrapersonal process and used psychodynamic theory in relation to the self before they use it with clients. I have found this not to be the case in my work as a coach mentor and coach supervisor, and I intended to challenge the thinking of these authors as part of this research.

Coaching is a relational process, and I think coaches need a high level of self-awareness to serve their clients well. In reading the coaching literature, I notice a lack of commentary

on the coach's self-awareness or the assumption that the coach is self-aware. I could find no definition of self-awareness anywhere in the coaching literature and where it is mentioned in the context of the coach, it is generally assumed that this is achieved through self-reflection and introspection. The psychodynamic models say that people provide explanations for their behaviour. Based on my understanding of these models, I would argue that these explanations are rationalisations and when people do not understand their behaviour, they invent justifications. If the psychodynamic models are to be believed, then people are largely unaware of the influence of the unconscious mind. Looking at self-awareness through the psychodynamic lens, I would suggest that self-awareness cannot be achieved through self-reflection and introspection. However, this is one of those perceived truths that everyone believes. The coaching literature I reviewed does not specify this truth per se, but I think there is a distinct possibility that as a profession we are deluding ourselves. I found the literature to be concerned with what the coach can offer. I think that there may be a further assumption that successful coaching is independent of the capacity for introspection and self-analysis. I think Bachkirova (2011) addresses some of my concerns in her writing on the concept of self as an instrument. She argues eloquently that the traditional focus for coach training is on the development of skills and knowledge and that the next step in coach development should focus on the self and the reflexivity of the coach. I agree with her and my experience of assessing and supervising coaches suggests that six years after Bachkirova's writing, there is still a lack of reflexivity on the part of the coach.

Summary

In conducting the literature review for this research, it became apparent that theory is a 'vested interest'. Psychological theory tends to define its adherents as vehement enemies of the adherents of any other psychological theory. From my reading in support of the research, I found the language and models used in the theories were different, yet the core concepts were concordant. The theories researched are all connected to the psychodynamic schools. The concordant theme in the literature is the power of the unconscious mind and the influence it has on thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Everyday life is experienced through the conscious process, whilst the unconscious remains in the background but is not inactive or inert. The systems psychodynamic approach takes account of the effect on the individual and group of the system they operate within, and vice versa. In this research, I wanted to interpret the extent to which the coaching process is influenced by the coach's unconscious mind.

There are limitations to any theoretical perspective and I was mindful in choosing the psychodynamic approach that not all coaches work with this frame of reference and may

not be trained in any of the psychodynamic modalities. This being the case, they may have little or no understanding of the power of the unconscious mind and its influence in intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and, consequently, they may have limited awareness of thoughts, feeling and behaviours in them that are influencing their practice.

The psychodynamic approach tends to focus on weakness to the exclusion of strengths and I was very mindful throughout the research and analysis that the project was not to do with individual coach's strengths and weaknesses but rather to answer the research question, *how does the coach's unconscious mind influence the coaching process?*

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Approach

Introduction

As mentioned previously, the aim of the research is to explore the influence of the coach's unconscious mind on the coaching process. In this chapter, I aim to explain my rationale for choosing the methodology I did and to make explicit my understanding of the basic tenets of the chosen approach. Alongside this, I have brought my considerations of the ethical challenges in conducting this research and aimed to give the reader an insight into how I managed my own process through reflection and supervision.

Context and choice

To create an effective collaborative foundation on which to build the research, it was essential to work with my partners to identify the benefits for them of investing organisational resource in the project. In agreement with them, I settled on qualitative research. Creswell (1974) suggests that qualitative studies include ethnographies, the collection of primarily observational data of cultural groups. Critical ethnology carries an implicit obligation to understand and expose hegemonic regimes of truth within a social setting.

I was initially drawn to action research because I have experience of this methodology effecting change or making improvements through a cycle of investigation, action and reflection. In the words of Reason and Bradbury (2008, p.42), 'action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view'. I think this definition provides a flavour of the broad scope and intent of action research, with the aim of the development of individuals and their communities. McNiff (1993) added a further dimension on this topic, in that she describes action research as a term which refers to a practical way of looking at our own work to check that it is as we would like it to be. In other words, action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self.

As I considered action research as my preferred methodology, I imagined a small community of professional coaches working in partnership with me to reflect on why we each do the things we do and why we are the way we are in the context of our professional practice. I imagined the research report would show that we had conducted a systematic investigation into our own behaviour and the reasons for that behaviour and, thus, had a better understanding of ourselves so that we can continue developing both

individuals and, at the same time, develop our professional practice. As I further developed my thinking, I reflected on the limitations of this approach given the nature of the research question. The primary limitation, as I saw it, was the potential for the study to be perceived by participants as a judgement of their professional practice, which may impact on their willingness to participate.

As an Organisation Development Consultant, I frequently conduct critical ethnography studies, and I was keen to expand my repertoire of research methodology rather than default to my comfort zone. Reflecting on research methodology options, I was influenced by three factors. As a Transactional Analyst, I believe in the power of phenomenology and realise in my own behaviour that I not only remember the past but I re-experience it. This is true for all of us; thus, the day-to-day lived experience of human beings is shaped by how we experience ourselves and others. This means that it is not possible for us to be in the here and now and fully present moment by moment in every relational encounter. The second factor was that I was introduced to the work of Spinelli (1989), and it was my enthusiasm for existential philosophy that drew me to explore phenomenology as a research methodology. The third and perhaps most important factor was my experience as a research participant in a study into the impact on the psychological health and emotional wellbeing of training as a Transactional Analyst. The researcher used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and I had a profound learning experience during my involvement in the research process.

I carefully considered other methods, such as social ethnography, phenomenological research and IPA. I confess that my experience as a participant in IPA drew me to that methodology. I read extensively on IPA and the narrative below explores my understanding.

IPA is a popular approach to qualitative inquiry. It originated in psychology and is best known in that field, but is increasingly being picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social and health sciences. IPA overlaps with other essentially qualitative approaches, including ethnography, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). More recent humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, emphasising the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings are placed on findings as well as making the researcher visible in the 'frame' of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

The work of Heidegger (1927/1962) and Sartre (1943/1966) bring our attention to things which matter to us, the people, objects, places and relationships which constitute our lived experience. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that much of what is important to us concerns bigger life goals, relationships, personal and professional projects and the factors which inhibit or facilitate these. Within the context of these arenas, individuals naturally engage in considerable mental activity. Phenomenology is concerned with those experiences which register as significant for the participant. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that there are layers of reflection and that a distinction can be drawn from informal reflection, which occurs spontaneously within the individual, and formal phenomenological reflection, which is produced by the researcher conducting a phenomenological enquiry.

Doing any psychological research involves another individual, the researcher, entering the reflective loop. Thus, within the research encounter, the researcher facilitates the participant in providing an account of their reflections. Stanley and Wise (1993) were among the first to challenge the idea that the researcher was a neutral, dispassionate seeker of truth and to insist on greater transparency of the motives, identities and preconceptions researchers bring to their work. It was important to me to understand how my own values, prejudices and identity might be brought to the process. Awareness of my own process in the here and now of the research interviews was essential for me to engage in reflexivity.

I committed to exploring, describing, interpreting and situating how the participants made sense of their experience. A researcher's epistemology, according to Holloway (1997), Mason (1996) and Creswell (1994), is essentially their theory of knowledge, which serves to decide how the social phenomena will be studied. In working with IPA methodology, I entered the world of the research subjects to understand, not simply observe, how they interpret their world and rationalise their decisions in the context of the coaching process through discovering the influence of the unconscious mind.

I found the challenges of conducting an IPA-based research project numerous, not least of which was the generation of large quantities of interview notes, recordings and other records which had to be analysed and the analysis was challenging when the data did not fall into neat categories. Hycner (1985) and Smith et al. (2009) have given helpful instruction on how to rise to these challenges.

Madison (2003) suggests that researchers need to consider what is at stake when they take the role of transmitter of information and skilled interpreter. She suggests there are five central questions for researchers to consider:

- How do we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions and frame of analysis as researchers?
- How do we predict the consequences or evaluate our own potential to do harm?
- How do we maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and others?
- How is the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition?
- How, in what location or through what intervention will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom and justice?

Finding my answers to these questions [was](#) crucial to how I engaged with the research methodology.

I mentioned in the text above the factors that drew me to a phenomenological approach and I believed that IPA as a methodology would most likely deliver the answer to the research question.

In discussions with my learning partners, I proposed IPA to work with the participants on the development of an in-depth understanding of their lived experience in coaching. I intended to engage with participants to uncover their unconscious processes and to ascertain the influence these may have on the coaching process. As the project evolved, refinements were made to the methodology, primarily to capture more in-depth data.

With the benefit of hindsight, I realise I was more than a little naïve in my decision to choose IPA. Looking back from a purist's perspective at everything I set out to do was, to some extent, contradictory to IPA methodology. Most of the research studies I looked at were conducted in the field of health, so there was little evidence of the efficacy of this approach in answering my research question. IPA largely depends on a free narrative, with little intervention from the researcher, and I made the same assumption that I accused coaching authors of making earlier in this text – that coaches are already self-aware, and I believed that semi-structured interview questions would be enough to elicit data which would answer the research question. I assumed the use of IPA would allow the participants to make sense of their own experiences through self-reflection and introspection. This led to another assumption, in that I believed the participants would be inclined towards in-depth self-reflection. I thought I could balance the hermeneutics of empathy with the hermeneutics of suspicion, and had I paid more attention to my own internal process during the period in which I was deciding which research route to take, I

would have realised that my own attachment to psychodynamic theory would render it, at best, challenging and, at worst, impossible for me to balance those two.

Researcher's perspective

The philosophical approach underpinning the research question is the social constructivist worldview. In working with this frame of reference, I hold the view that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences and these meanings are varied and multiple, leading me as the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning to a few categories or ideas. The goal of research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied.

Epistemology

Apart from the work of Kets de Vries (2006, 2010) and De Haan (2008, 2016), in reviewing literature relevant to this research, I could find no work which focussed specifically on the coach's unconscious mind. I was informed by those authors who look at coaching through the psychodynamic lens, primarily Bluckert (2006), Brunning (2006), Kets de Vries (2006), Lee (2010) and De Haan (2008.) I took a broader look at the psychology of coaching as presented by Palmer and Whybrow (2007), Peltier (2009), Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck (2010) and Bachkirova (2011). The writing of Tomaschek (2006) and the work of De Vries, Guillen, Korotov and Florent-Treacy (2010) supported my reflections on how coaches co-create a process with their coachees. Most of the aforementioned books focus on ways in which the coach can help the client discover their inner world in support of self-discovery. This fuelled my curiosity about the inner world of the coach and how they make discoveries about their unconscious processes.

In working from a social constructivist perspective, I believe that we co-create knowledge and understanding through social interaction, a basic human urge to grow and develop, and a willingness to learn from, and be guided by, others. Ontological learning (Sieler, 2007) is learning about being human. The research focussed on generating learning about the human process in the context of the professional role of coach – human being first, coach second. I hope the ontological learning that has emerged from this research will offer participants, the learning partners and the coaching profession in general a potent means for recreating ourselves individually and collectively.

It is difficult for me to separate epistemology, ontology and personal perspectives. They are closely woven together in my frame of reference and have implications for my ability to achieve research neutrality. The way I collected the data, what I saw, heard and interpreted during the data collection, the time of analysis and the write-up are influenced by my inner world. Mason (2002, p.60) said: 'No research or story can be ontologically neutral'.

Ethical considerations and challenges

Given the nature of the individuals involved and their work, the ethical and confidentiality elements of the research were vitally important, not only to warrant the trust of the individuals concerned but also to protect the organisation development leaders for their part in the participant engagement process. As well as following Middlesex University's ethical guidelines and being cognisant of the research literature's stance on ethics (Bryman & Bell, 2007), I contacted the individuals by letter and contracted with them in the first session of the research process. They were advised they could withdraw at any time and, in choosing to do so, any material relating to them would be withdrawn. As a Master Coach accredited by the International Coach Federation and a Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst accredited by the European Association of Transactional Analysis, I am bound by the code of ethics of both those bodies. I spoke with the Chair of Research and the Chair of Ethics in each of these professional bodies to ensure that my work as a researcher met ethical guidelines and I received helpful and supportive advice.

The choice of methodology placed me as a key instrument in the process. How I presented myself, how I engaged with participants and how I contracted with them for the conversations were likely to impact on their feelings of safety and willingness to engage. My focus was on eliciting and understanding the meaning that the participants held about the issue in question. Crucial to contracting for in-depth exploration of the participants' inner worlds was to show my genuine interest in understanding how they make meaning and how this influences their behaviour. They needed assurance that I was working from a place of curiosity, not one of judgement, of their work.

I recognised the importance of giving the participants permission to be who they are, to speak their truth without fear of shame or judgement. Alongside this, it was crucial not only to offer protection to the individuals involved, making sure they could not be identified, but also to co-create a safe and contained space in which to explore their inner worlds. The research participants became deeply engaged in exploring and understanding their own internal process. I was mindful that unconscious communications in the

research encounter could affect trust. I would go as far as to say they became co-researchers in the process.

Smith and Osborne (2003) suggest that IPA involves a 'double hermeneutic', in that the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of their experience. This illustrates the dual role of the researcher as being both like and unlike the participant. In one sense, as a researcher I am like the participant, a human being drawing on everyday human resources to make sense of the world. On the other hand, I am not the participant: I only have access to the participant's experience through what the participant reports about it and I am also seeing this through my own experientially informed lens. So, in that sense the participants' meaning making is first order and my sense making is second order.

Ricouer (1970) distinguishes between two broad interpretive positions, some hermeneutics of empathy and some hermeneutics of suspicion. The former position attempts to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms whilst the latter uses theoretical perspectives from the outside to shed light on the experience. I stood alongside the participant, to look at them from a different angle, to ask questions and to be curious about what they were saying. This moved me away from pure representation of what the participant is saying to more reliance on interpretive work as the researcher. I was, however, attempting to understand, both in the sense of trying to see what it is like for someone as well as analysing, illuminating and making sense of something. I challenged myself to take a centre-ground position and to combine the hermeneutics of empathy with the hermeneutics of suspicion.

As a coaching strategist and provider of accredited coach training, I have a vested interest in the success of coaching and asked myself, how might this affect the research at both the conscious and unconscious level? Ethically, I was mindful to keep challenging myself on the purity of my process as I engaged in the research both at data collection and analysis stage. I draw parallels between the research I am conducting into the influence of the coach's unconscious and the potential influence of my unconscious. I believe that constantly critically reviewing my activities and outcomes both through the process of self-reflection and supervision supported me to be as transparent and clean in the process as is humanly possible. As a Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst, I am trained to pay attention to my own process as far as is humanly possible and in this context, I believe that there would have been times when my own unconscious mind was at work and I would have been unaware of this.

Participants and sample size

In co-creating the contract with my learning partners, I negotiated access to internal and external coaches within each organisation. Internal coaches were invited to participate and self-selected themselves for their involvement. I wanted to ensure that there was mutual consent for participation and it was not something they felt obliged to do. The internal coaches contacted me directly to advise me they were willing to participate. Six internal coaches came forward but, due to work commitments, only four could complete the process.

The partner organisations contacted external coaches, asking if they were willing to have their contact details released to me for inviting participation in the study. I invited those who released their details to participate. Six external coaches came forward, all of whom knew me in a professional context, and two chose not to be involved once they better understood the process. I worked with a sample size of eight for the study.

The participants came from a range of professional backgrounds; all the internal coaches offer coaching in addition to their substantive professional role in the organisation. These roles range from Organisation Development Consultant to Clinical Practitioner. The external coaches work primarily as coaches, but also offer a menu of development interventions to their clients. The participants were women in the age range of 40 to 55. Within the coaching profession, there are a higher number of women than men (www.coachfederation.org), although no definitive research has been done on the reasons for this. There is speculation that coaching is seen as a 'helping' profession or form of 'talking therapy' and there is a higher preponderance on women in these roles. No men accepted the invitation to participate in the research, although two were approached.

The internal coaches spent most of their working lives in professional roles in the National Health Service in Scotland. The external coaches have a diverse range of professional backgrounds, mostly in the fields of Human Resource Management, Organisation Development and Learning and Development.

The depth of coach training, professional accreditation, coaching philosophy and approach was diverse across the sample, although all of them had exposure to, and an understanding of, the psychodynamic approach to coaching. Four of the eight actively use psychodynamic models in their practice.

Specific research techniques

The specific techniques employed during this project were documentary research, keeping a research journal, keeping a supervision journal, keeping a reflexive journal; participant interviews using metaphor, participant interviews using symbolic representation, and participant indirect observation revisiting symbolic representation. The physical organisation of the data generated through the research process was complex, with both hard and soft copies being created and the generation of large computer files.

Documentary research

Documentary research refers to documents, articles and literature (library, electronic and internet-based material and current published works). As all research involves analysis of current published works on related subjects, I read critically and extensively the texts and writings of others in the field of research. I kept extensive notes by hand, computer and voice memo, which I used to complete the literature review and methodology chapters of this thesis.

Research journal

I kept a reflective journal noting my reactions to what I was reading, to the research process, to the participants and to the data I was capturing. This reflective monologue facilitated the exploration, examination and understanding of what I was thinking, feeling and learning. Re-reading the journal in preparation for writing the thesis, I found it to be a thoughtful consideration of theoretical models, personal experience and interpersonal relationships. This reflection served as a form of internal enquiry, extending the relevance of the theory and deepening my understanding of the practice of advanced research.

This reflection challenged my assumptions, invited new questions and supported the making sense of my experiences. I became an active co-creator of my own knowledge. I integrated the theoretical learning through a process of *reflection-on-action*, that is, making sense of the experience after the event and *reflection-in-action*, that is, trying to make sense of the experience whilst it is occurring (Schon, 1987).

I wanted my journal to reflect my lived experience as much as possible in experiential terms, focussing on particular situations or events. My descriptions were not, of course, phenomenological descriptions. The journal highlighted the lived experiences which I wanted to reflect on phenomenologically, and it was these lived experiences which informed supervision.

The supervision journal

The reflective journal strongly supported supervision; it ensured topics for supervision were what I most need to pay attention to and learn. The core themes that came through were the parallel process, reflection on the transference/countertransference dynamic in the interviews, theory and data – integration and interpretation, and ethics and professional practice. The purpose of this journal was to capture the learning from supervision.

The reflexive journal

I kept a reflexive journal which largely consisted of field notes and post-interview reflections. My purpose in doing this was to create a space for consideration of how I was managing myself in the role of researcher. I was curious about the dualities of my position as coach, consultant, supervisor and researcher. I wanted to pay attention to how I was making sense of my experience in the organisations concerned as a researcher and how this was similar or different to my experience of the organisations as a coach or consultant. The material emerging from the interviews led me to further explore my imago of the organisations and metaphors for coaching, myself as a coach, myself as a researcher, how I experience the coaching process, how I experience the research process and so on. The outcome that emerged from this reflexive writing was that I did not have to deconstruct myself and stop being a coach. Rather, I was able to invent myself differently as a researcher (see Appendix 3 for excerpts from the journals).

Validity and quality of the research process

A significant challenge in conducting this type of work is assessing the validity and quality of the research. I believe the research has validity in the field of coaching in that the insights gained from the research can be used to support the development of coach education, which raises psychological awareness and the power of the unconscious mind. The findings and conclusions make it possible for developers to design education programmes which result in deeper and more meaningful psychological awareness and critical reflective practice in the profession.

The data was collected through purposeful and homogenous sampling, and the outcomes are based on my interpretation of the data. Different criteria were proposed for the endeavour of assessing validity in qualitative studies, such as those proposed by Smith et al. (2009) and Langridge (2007). I used Yardley's (2000) four principles to offer a way of performing this assessment.

Yardley's first principle is sensitivity to context, which asks the researcher to be well grounded not only in the method of analysis, but also the philosophy, methodology and epistemology behind it. This context also includes the socio-cultural setting, where the study was made and the relationship between the researcher and participants. My enquiry into the methodology, the rigorous methods followed, the dedicated commitment to both reflexivity and supervision, together with a mindfulness of the relationship during the interviews, I believe, supported this principle.

The second principle refers to commitment and rigour, which is supported in this research by the dedicated and rigorous application of the methods employed. I showed a high degree of commitment to the participants during the data collection, mainly through paying close attention to what the participants were saying. There was a high correlation between demonstrating commitment and demonstrating sensitivity.

To achieve rigour in the process, I carefully matched the research participants to the research question. In the interviews, I achieved a balance between attachment and detachment, consistency in probing, picking up on what seemed to be important clues and digging deeper to both enter and understand the participants' inner worlds. This was assisted by my experience as a Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst (Organisational) and as a Master Coach.

Yardley's third principle relates to transparency and coherence. The transparency of this study can be evaluated based on the results chapter below through enquiry into the clarity of my narrative and the extent to which the conclusions I draw make sense. The component of coherence does not refer to having coherent results but rather as Smith et al. mention (2009, p.182): 'It is not that contradictions shouldn't be in the data, they are often the richest part of the text but the analysis of the contradictions should not in itself be contradictory!'. This refers to the clarity and coherence the analysis should aspire to.

It is perhaps for the reader to comment more on coherence than me as the researcher. I attempted to achieve a high degree of fit between the research which was conducted and the underlying theoretical assumptions being used in the analysis. I tried to stay true to IPA through keeping a focus on the significance of the experiential domain for the participants.

Yardley's fourth principle is that of impact and importance. Yardley suggests that irrespective of how well a piece of research is conducted, a test of its real validity is whether it tells the reader something interesting, important and useful. Like Langridge (2007), I question this principle. For me, knowledge has an inherent value, even when it does not impact on the world beyond the reader.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to explain the research strategy and give details on the research methodology and approach. The next chapter focuses on the actual research activities and the applied methodology.

Chapter Four: Research Activities and Applied Methodology

Introduction

This chapter gives the reader an overview of the research activities and applied methodology which emerged as the project unfolded.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis and psycho-social methodology

I piloted a set of semi-structured interviews to test the questions and methodology to decide whether the basic interview process was likely to invite the depth of exploration I believed necessary to generate meaningful data. The questions were focussed on uncovering data on the participants' lived experience of themselves, of others in the coaching relationship and of the coaching process. I conducted pilot interviews with seven people from the United Kingdom and Europe, using exploratory questions to interpret how the relationships unfolded and impacted on each other, based on what the participants said about their lived experiences. The seven interviews took, in total, circa 20 hours. The interviews did not produce the data I had anticipated based on my own experience of being involved in IPA research as a participant.

I sensed the answers gave relevant data, albeit at a somewhat superficial level, and the interpretation would be subject to significant hypothesis on my part. Coaching is a relational process, involving emotional involvement and, given the nature of the research question, it became apparent to me that to work only at the discursive level was to undermine the participants, myself and the research outcomes. The reality confronting me at this stage was that pure IPA was unlikely to allow the research to go beneath the surface and uncover the unconscious mind. This created a dilemma, with which I struggled for some considerable time, and I considered whether to seek permission from the university and my research partners to change the methodology. I re-visited the work of Smith et al. (2009) and was relieved to read that IPA research can take many forms. At this point, I started to consider my options. I started to explore methods I could use to invite deeper reflection on the part of the participants and turned to reviewing psycho-social methodology in the work of Clarke and Hoggett (2009).

Psycho-social methodology encourages free association and I wondered at this stage if I was setting another trap for myself. I believed it was crucial to invite the research participants to engage in reflexive practice to surface assumptions, preconceptions and mental constructs. Only through doing this could the research question be answered, and

I was doubtful that questions that invited free association would produce reflexivity. My understanding is that free association can be achieved using symbolic representation and with a minimum input for the researcher in terms of the questions asked of the participants. I use symbolic representation in my work and, from experience, believed employing this methodology would take the participants, me and the research to a deeper meaning. I struggled with the idea that I was moving from pure IPA towards a psycho-social approach. The challenge was to connect psycho-social methodology to the principles of IPA.

Holloway and Jefferson (2000) argue that using a psycho-social methodology involves conceptualising both the researcher and the participants as co-producers of meanings. I was inviting participants to tell their story, working with me in a co-created process, allowing me to collect emerging data from the research sessions to create a narrative from which I could draw conclusions on the research question. Clark and Hoggett (2009, p.2) state: 'psycho-social research is a cluster of methodologies which point towards a distinct position, that of researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive.' This resonated for me in the context of the unconscious dynamics and defences that are likely to exist in the research environment and integrated with my desire to engage in sustained self-reflection on not only my methods and emotional involvement in the research but also on the relationship between myself and the researched.

The use of visual imagery is a key part of psycho-social methodology and a way of creating deeper meaning and understanding. What cannot be accessed verbally can often be embodied in actions, images, the use of artefacts and dreams. Since the inception of the discipline of psycho-social research, ethnographic fieldwork has acknowledged the central value of imagery as a source of data. Hunt (1989, p.29) notes: 'Psychoanalytic anthropologists accept the hermeneutic paradigm but recognise that ethnographic encounter involves unconscious as well as cultural dimensions'.

The more I understood psycho-social methodology, the more appropriate it seemed to the research. Psychodynamic models and hermeneutics assume an inner world. Hermeneutics assume much of this world is accessible to the participant, whilst the psychodynamic models assume that the inner world is often hidden. I was attracted to IPA as a methodology because it is possible to make links between the lived experience of the research participants and theoretical frameworks. Smith et al. (2009) mention layers of reflection and particularly the concept of deliberate controlled reflection. In bringing together IPA and psycho-social methodology, I believed I invited deliberate in-depth controlled reflection.

I concluded that the researcher is a facilitator of deliberate controlled reflection; thus, the use of different methodologies to facilitate the reflection is within the boundaries of IPA. The use of metaphor and symbolism were appropriate in the service of the participants and in answering the research question, the caveats being that the methodology is ethical and is not likely to harm the participant and the participant is a willing and engaged partner in the process. I used the reflexive journaling process to pay attention to the unconscious dynamics emerging in the research process and to reflect on my part in these.

Without realising it at the time, I created a hybrid methodology and so embarked on the research without this realisation troubling me. Reflecting on this as I write my thesis, I think it is as well that I did not own at that stage the creation of a hybrid as I am sure I would have taken fright and opted for a completely different methodology. I am glad that I did not do so because the resulting data collection was a rich process for me and, I believe, for the participants.

I decided to conduct another set of pilot interviews to test working with metaphor and symbolism so as not fall into the trap of assuming this methodology would work where narrative had failed. I developed a broad set of questions for the interviews and offered a range of metaphors and symbols to the participants. I worked with ten coaches from the United Kingdom and Europe. The purpose of this was twofold:

- To ensure that the methodology supported the depth of reflection required to research beneath the surface and the discursive
- To choose the metaphor and symbols to be used in the research process.

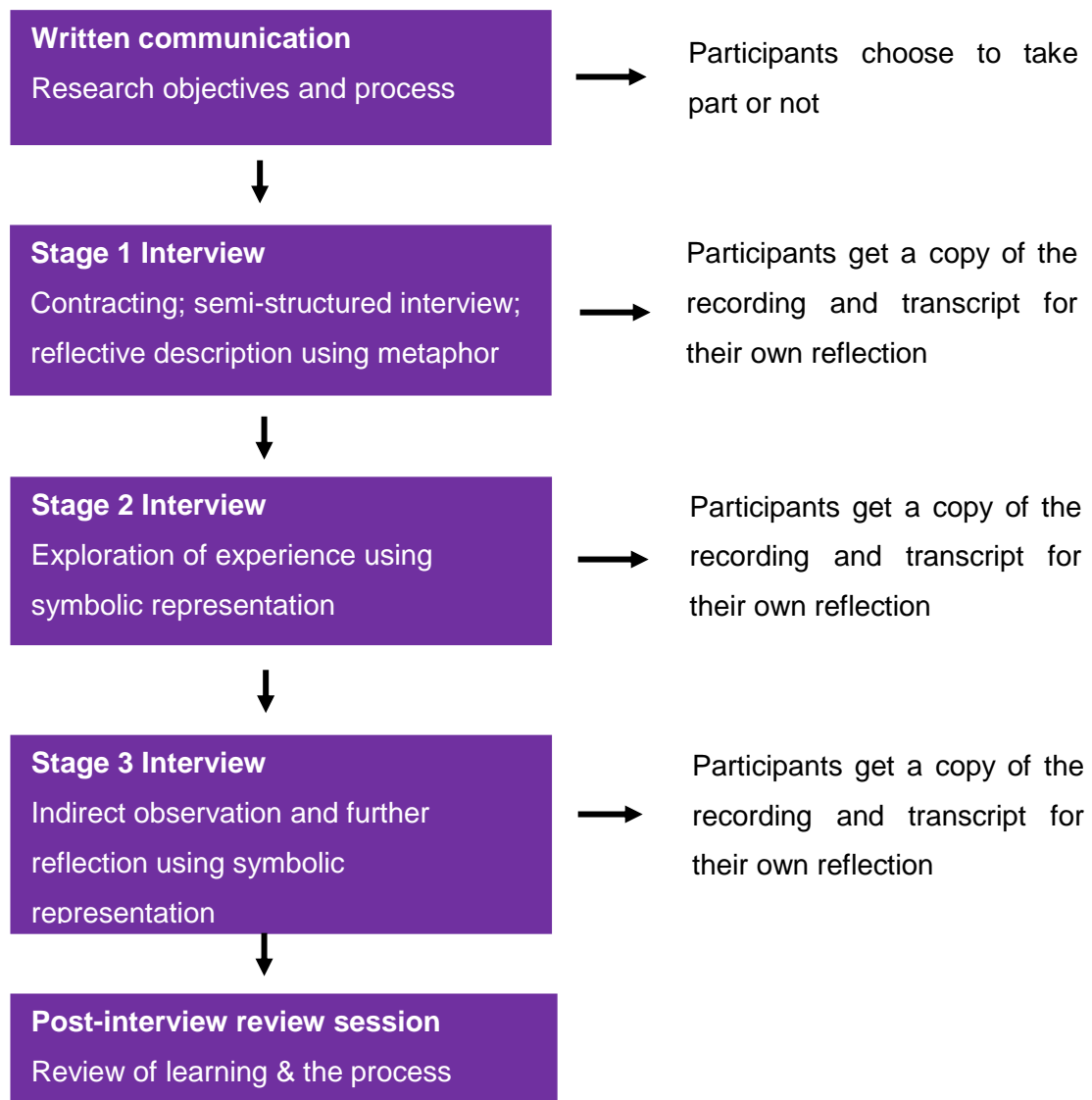
The outcome of this further pilot study influenced the choice of the metaphor of seasons and of toys as symbols. This was due to feedback from participants regarding the options they found most powerful in surfacing their perceptions and mental constructs.

Data collection

I set out to study how coaches experience and, thus, interpret themselves; the coachees, the sponsor (line manager), the coaching process and the organisations they work in. I was interested to explore the extent to which the coach's unconscious mind was present and influenced the coaching process.

I collected information through semi-structured interviews in the first two stages and moved on to indirect observation of the coach at work in stage 3. At each stage in the process, the research participants were sent a copy of the recording and the transcript.

Figure 1: Overview of the research stages



First point of contact

The first contact with the prospective participants was by email from the organisational partners. Attached to this email was the Overview for Learning Partners and Participants, referred to above as Appendix 1.

My first contact with the participants was by letter (see Appendix 4), seeking to confirm their interest and setting up the first meeting. Participants were advised there would be space in the first session for contracting for the process and to have their questions

answered. They were advised that I would be inviting them to work with metaphor and symbolism. Given the nature of the research and the topic and the ever-present psychological level of the contract (Berne, 1966), I thought it important to create space to surface issues and hidden meanings.

First stage interview

Starting with the semi-structured interviews, I used a set of broad questions and followed these up with laddering¹ questions (see Appendix 5). For clarification, laddering is a method that helps elicit the higher or lower level abstractions of the concepts people use to organise their world. The method supports peeling back the layers of the participant's experience. Laddering questions are used to understand the way in which the participant sees the world (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The questions were designed to understand the coach's lived experience and begin to unlock information on the coach's unconscious process. The questions were posed to invite self-reflection on the part of the participants. The nature and construct of the questions was influenced by the theoretical perspectives guiding the research. All the interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. Examples of transcripts of all three stages of interview for both an external and internal coach can be found in Appendix 7.

The process invited participants to use metaphor to describe their experience of themselves, their clients, the sponsor (line manager) and the organisation. They were further asked to describe their experience of the coaching process, again using metaphor. The essence of metaphor is the understanding and experiencing of one kind of thing in terms of another. The use of metaphor was designed to take the research of lived experience deeper into the unconscious mind.

Second stage interviews

At the second stage interviews, I worked with symbols and metaphoric landscape (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000).² Symbolic representation is a method used in the helping professions

¹ Laddering is an interview technique where a seemingly simple response to a question is pushed by the interviewer to access the unconscious mind.

² A symbol is something that is familiar in daily life yet possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something hidden from us.

A metaphoric landscape is the picture that emerges through the exploration of situations, relationships and issues using symbols.

for facilitating clients to become familiar with the symbolic domain of their experience so that they can discover a new understanding of themselves, others and their world. Symbols are the tangible components of a metaphor; they form the content of symbolic perception, which cannot be seen, heard, felt or otherwise sensed directly. This methodology invites participants to explore the symbol's attributes, consider its characteristics and properties and consider how this might reflect their unconscious mind. The location of the symbol specifies its position and meaning within the metaphorical landscape.

When people explore this world and its inherent logic, their metaphors and ways of being are honoured. As mentioned earlier, a choice of symbols was made because of working with a small pilot focus group using different types of symbols to describe the constituents under investigation. This group reported that they found using toys more powerful in understanding their perceptions and relationships than the other symbols offered.

Third stage interviews - indirect observation

For the third stage interviews involving indirect observation, participants were asked to bring a video recording of a coaching session. The purpose of indirect observation is to take the exploration of what is emerging in the coaching process to a deeper level. This moved the enquiry from self-reporting and self-understanding to exploration of what was being co-created in the relationship and the coach's role in the process. We watched the recording together and the participants were invited to explore what was going on in their inner world as the conversation developed and whether their image, created in the stage two session, had changed. Control over pausing the video for reflection was at the will of the participant.

Comments

I developed an interview protocol for asking questions and recording data. The interviews were recorded and I kept brief notes as a back-up. The data will be destroyed after the end of the DProf process.

I believe the methods chosen invited participants to explore how they construct their reality through reflection of the lived experience. Triangulation was achieved through collecting data using different techniques at different stages and through the combination of IPA and psycho-social research techniques. The methodology sought to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon.

Post research review sessions

I conducted post research review sessions to invite reflection on learning from the research and to capture information on how their practice had changed because of their participation. These sessions addressed any concerns the participants may have had about how the data would be reported.

Review of my own process in the research encounter

At each stage in the data collection process, I listened to all the individual recordings to explore my own process and to pay attention to the unfolding dynamics in the research encounter. My concern was to stay clear in the role of researcher and not to move into supervisory mode. I was also curious to uncover how my own unconscious mind influenced the research process. The things I noticed when listening to these recordings created rich data for reflection and for supervision.

Method of analysis and emerging themes

I listened to each interview recording twice to revisit the atmosphere and tone of the encounter and to reflect on the process between myself and the participant. I prepared, read and re-read the transcripts before I began my first analytical reading. I made notes in the left-hand margin that examined the semantic comments and language used on a very exploratory level. My focus was descriptive and phenomenological as I tried to 'stay close to the participant's explicit meaning' (Smith et al., 2009, p.79). I then moved on to more interpretative engagement, which involved a line-by-line analysis of each of transcript for each participant and made reference to my initial notes in the left-hand margin. These interpretative comments were noted in the right-hand margin of the transcript for each participant and then across the eight participants. I was seeking to notice the themes that were emerging from the data and identify these, looking for convergence, divergence, commonality and nuance (Smith et al., 2009). At this stage the themes were tentative, more akin to loose ideas taking form rather than firm labels. I completed this process with each participant, printed out the emergent themes and sought to cluster them into groups and gradually create a shape (see Appendix 6 as an example). Some emergent themes became diminished in importance, being either too weak or subsumed under stronger themes.

My experience of theme development was a result of internal dialogue between myself as the researcher, the coded data and my own psychological knowledge; the latter also informed the development of the relationship between the themes. The process was by no

means linear and involved certain themes initially emerging as potentially significant and then receding in importance as my engagement with the whole body of the material developed. Working within the hermeneutic circle was particularly important at this stage to ensure that my interpretative ideas, expressed in a table of themes, were valid, coherent and had emerged from an authentic engagement with each of the participants' interviews. Writing up the result was a continuation of this iterative and reflexive process and involved continually referring to verbatim transcripts, margin notes and theme tables to ensure that the results could be traced back through the various stages of the research and that they were authentic. In the end, I identified three superordinate themes,³ which were supported by three subordinate themes. These, in turn, had been generated from some 45 emergent themes across the full range of the data.

The focus of the research intervention was different at each stage (see figures two, three and four below).

Summary

I have endeavoured to explain how I shifted and shaped the research activities and the applied methodology as the project unfolded. I have explained the stages of the research process and the methods applied at each stage. This chapter concludes with an overview of the method of analysis. In the next chapter, I will share the results from the interviews and describe how meaning was created.

³ Superordinate themes in IPA capture a variety of themes embodied in the participants' experiences. Subordinate themes are the core themes encapsulated in the superordinate categories.

Chapter Five: Results

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I referred to the superordinate and subordinate themes which emerged during the analysis of the data. The text below explains how I categorised the themes and, following on from this, I will describe what happened at each stage in the research, giving voice to the participants through verbatim comments. I will share my analysis of the data that emerged at each stage.

Superordinate themes

As mentioned in Chapter Four, three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts of the interviews. These are:

- ***The idealised self*** – this label emerged as I considered the data collected from the stage one interviews. The early part of the interview focuses on how the participants both perceive and experience themselves using a simple narrative. The latter part of the interview invites deeper reflection using metaphor and generated information on how they both perceive and experience themselves in relation to other parties to the contract and consideration of how this influences the process of their work.
- ***The authentic self*** – this label emerged as I considered the data collected from the stage two interviews. The second stage interview sought deeper reflection and exploration about how they experience the parties to the relationship and how they make meaning of that experience. What the participants reported was a deeper understanding of their unconscious process and how this might be impacting on their work.
- ***The unconscious self*** – this label emerged as I considered the data from the third stage interviews, which included indirect observation of the participants coaching. The data emerging from this stage in the process showed that the participants' perceptions and experiences of the parties to the contract influenced how they work. The label was chosen to conceptualise the idea of the unconscious mind and its influence on how humans connect and work.

Although the labels emerged as I considered the data from each stage in the research, the themes had relevance at each stage and captured the participants' awareness and insight.

These superordinate themes were derived from, and supported by, various subordinate themes that were generated because of a double hermeneutic engagement with each interview transcript. The subordinate themes ultimately fell into three categories. The subordinate themes connect to each of the superordinate themes and seek to draw out deeper reflection and consideration of the unconscious mind.

Subordinate themes

- ***Focus on self*** – This theme explores the participants' beliefs and experiences of their way of being as a coach. It communicates an expanding awareness as the research process unfolds, taking the participant from discursive narrative to deeper meaning and reflection on their sense of self.
- ***Focus on relationships*** – This theme explores participants' experiences of their relationship with the parties to the contract. They reflect more deeply on who they are as a coach in the relationship. The use of symbolic representation invites deeper reflection and consideration of how the coach's perception may influence their work. At this stage, participants are exploring their experience and feelings about the parties to the contract and the coaching process.
- ***Focus on the unconscious process*** – This theme captures the emerging understanding of the unconscious mind and its influence on the coaching process. Throughout the three stages of the research, there is an expanding awareness of the power of the unconscious mind and its influence on the coaching process, but the greatest awareness comes from stage three.

Theme trees

The focus of the interviews at each stage in the process allowed the data to be grouped and analysed as shown below:

Figure 2: Theme tree 1 - Idealised self

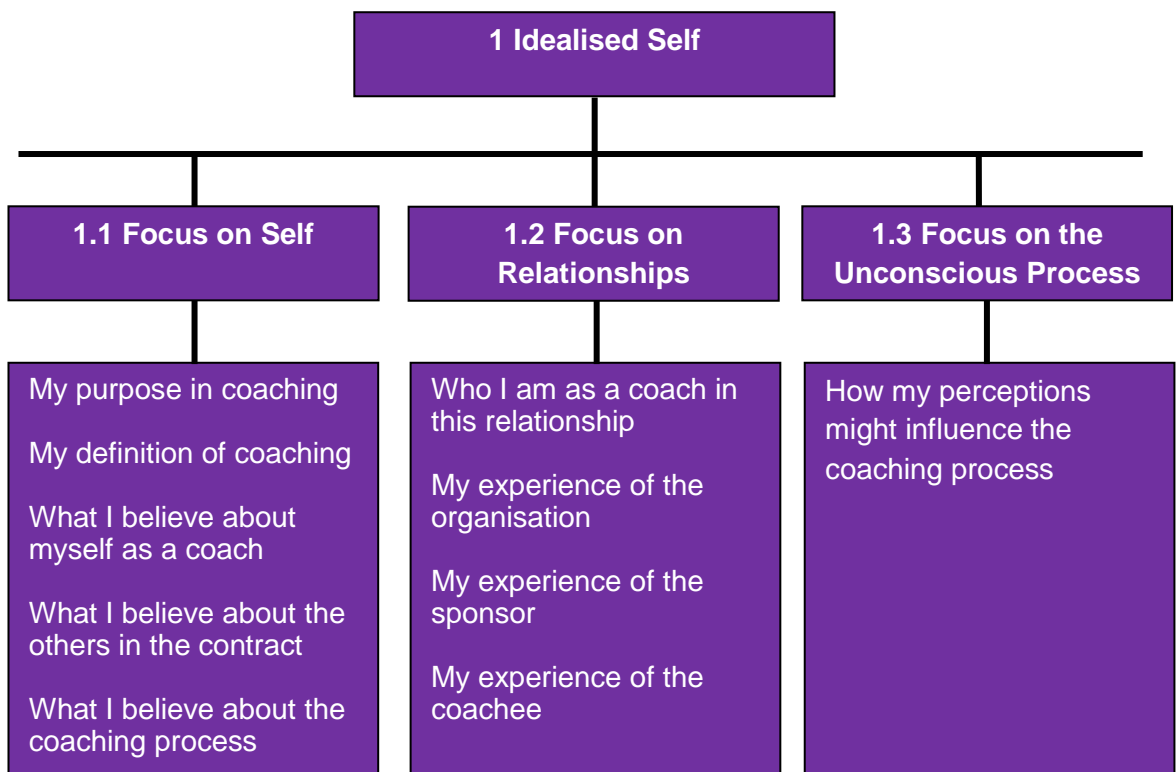


Figure 3: Theme tree 2 – Authentic Self

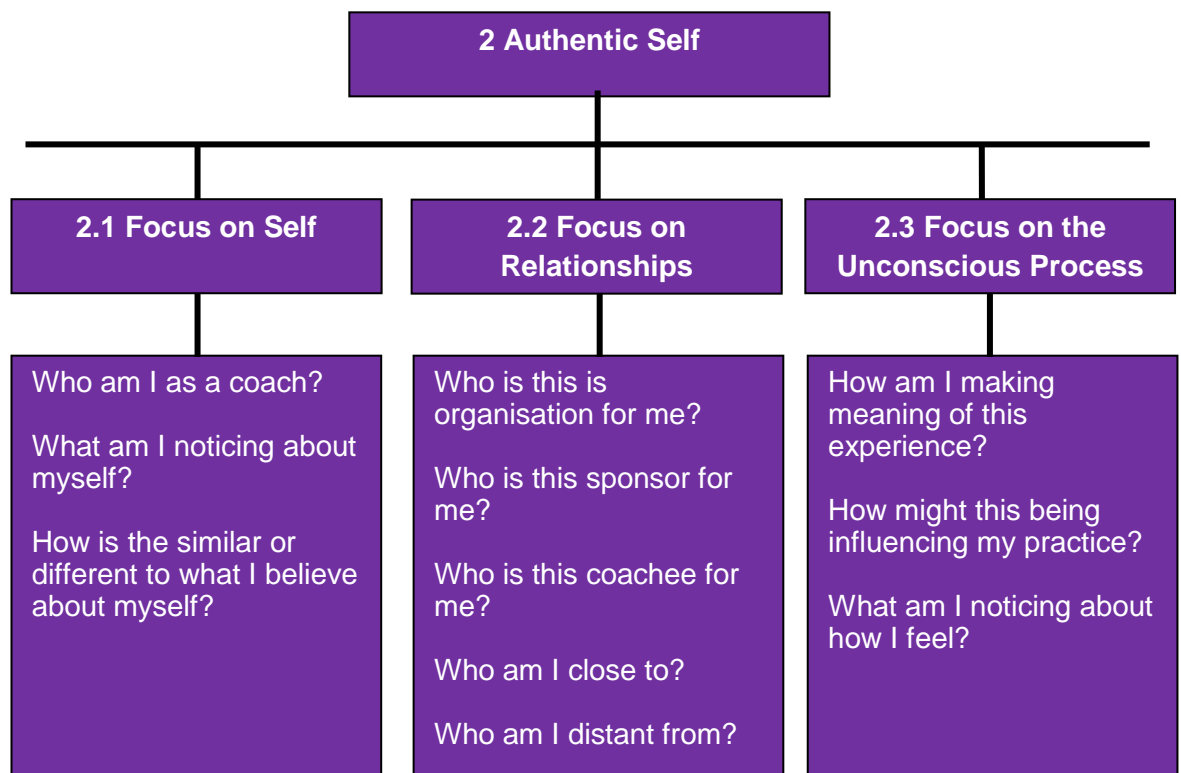
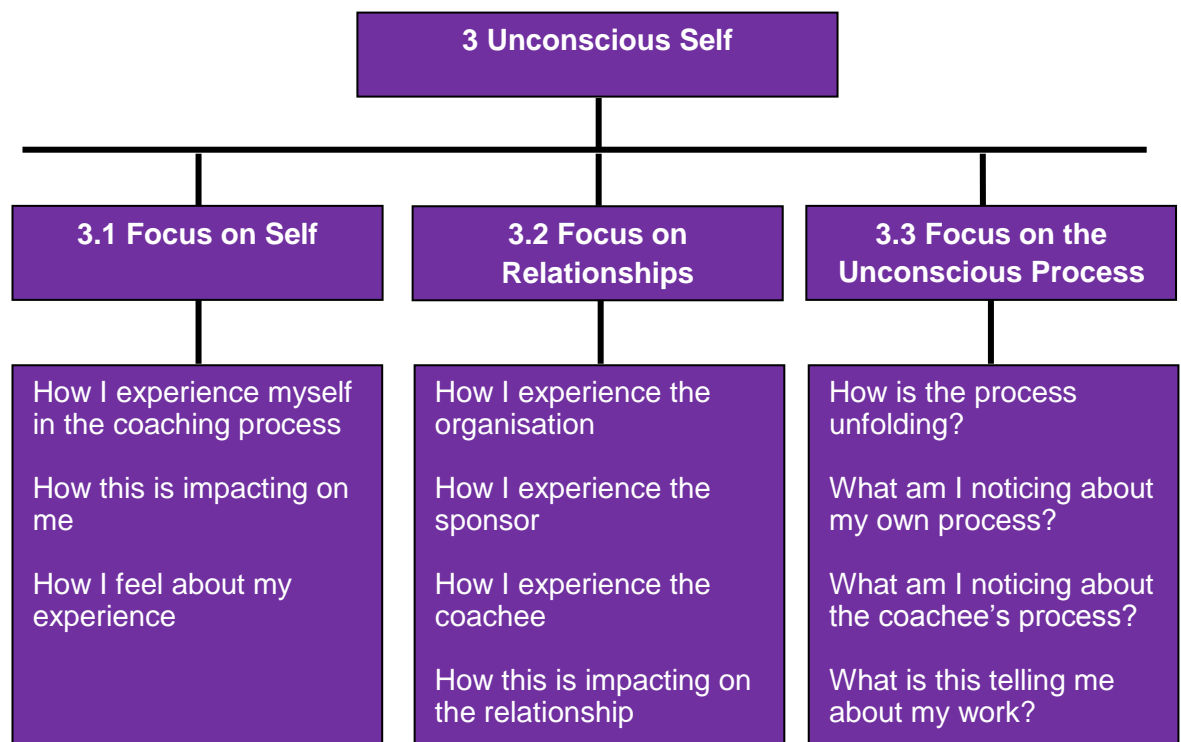


Figure 4: Theme tree 3 – Unconscious self



The following narrative seeks to tell the story of what emerged in the context of the themes without going into full detail but with verbatim examples and my analysis of the story. Examples of full transcripts from two participants are contained in Appendix 7. This chapter is by far the largest and I made a conscious choice to include a significant amount of verbatim data to both give voice to the participants in the thesis and to allow the reader to experience the unfolding story.

Stage 1 interviews – The idealised self

Focus on self

I asked participants to define their purpose in coaching; the reason for this question was to understand how they perceive coaching as a development intervention. Six of the eight defined their own purpose, examples being:

'My purpose in coaching is to create a safe space for the coachee to reflect on challenges and solve problems.'

'I would say my purpose is to be a challenging colleague who helps the coachee step back from the issues they face and look at things from a different perspective.'

'My purpose is to support the coachee to achieve his or her potential in the work environment.'

'I think the purpose of coaching is to offer an insight and action-oriented process to help the coachee be as effective as they can be.'

'To solve problems, shift perspective, and see challenges as opportunities.'

'To create a safe space for people to reflect on challenges and find ways to rise above these challenges.'

The remaining two used the purpose statement defined by their organisation.

The participants articulated their purpose in coaching and saw coaching as a developmental intervention focussed on problem solving and increasing effectiveness.

The participants readily accessed a definition of coaching, with some of them having developed their own, whilst others worked the definition offered by the professional coaching body they belong to. Questions relating to roles and responsibilities of the parties to the contract, accountability issues, authority relationships and emotional resources generated broadly similar answers from all participants and they offered their frame of reference readily without pause for reflection. Some could offer examples.

When asked how they would define themselves as a coach, the following are examples of the terms they used:

'Wise guide', 'Facilitator', 'Learning partner' (used by four participants), 'Trusted colleague', 'Empathic ear'.

All the participants said they experienced coaching as an engaging developmental process which had positive outcomes for individuals and the organisation. They were clear to differentiate between coaching in a business context and life coaching. They were all able to articulate the difference between coaching and the other 'helping professions'.

Focus on relationships

Participants were asked to define the coaching process as a season. Six said spring, one said summer and one said autumn. They were asked to make connections between the season they had chosen and the coaching process as they experienced it. The following are examples of the answers:

'It is coming out of darkness, into light. You know it is the time when we see things start to grow.'

'It is about preparing the ground, you know that period of regeneration.'

'Coaching is a warm, nurturing process, bright and growth enhancing.'

As the interview progressed, participants were invited to consider the question, 'Who am I as a coach?' using metaphor and were asked to describe themselves as a season. Four answered 'spring, three answered 'summer' and one answered 'autumn'. They were asked to reflect on their way of being as a coach that caused them to choose the season they did. The following are examples of the responses:

'Summer because I exude warmth and acceptance, there is calmness to me; you know no storms or bad weather.'

'I would say spring because I am helping the coachee to push through the ground, to grow and flourish.'

'Spring describes me because I am bringing enough warmth and light to support growth but I am tough enough to expect the coachee to push through the difficulties.'

'Autumn for me is a time for harvesting, so I help the coachee to harvest their skills, knowledge and experience and to notice what they have in their larder.'

This was followed with the question, 'If I were to see you work as a coach what would I see you doing that would cause me to notice you were that particular season?' Participants, in general, took longer to reflect on this question. The following are examples of the answers:

'You would see me shining a light on the issue or challenge the coachee is facing, you would notice my energy and you would see the coachee grow as a result of the work we are doing and by grow, I mean get more awareness and be ready to push through difficulties.'

'I would be feeding the coachee, nourishing through listening, questioning and reflecting.'

'I want to say you would see me creating a space for growth but I find it hard to describe that in more detail, I think you would see me being supportive and tough in equal measure.'

'You would hear me focus on the positive; get the coachee to appreciate themselves, acknowledge their strengths before they look to develop the weaker areas.'

'I think you would just see me being with the coachee, allowing them to decide what they can best get from the time, I would have no agenda, they are the gardener, I am just the assistant; so they choose what to dig up, what to rake over and what to leave to rest.'

The participants were invited to reflect on the organisation using the same metaphor. Five of the eight said winter, describing the organisation as being a place of darkness, cold and lacking in growth. The others answered 'spring', and described their experience as one of hope and opportunity for growth. They were asked to think about how their experience of the organisation manifested itself in the coaching relationship. What emerged was that generally the participants saw the organisation as a key player in the process but did not see it as ever present; rather, it was almost like an external stakeholder holding the boundary of the coaching relationship. They were asked, 'what is it like for you to have a professional relationship with an organisation you experience as that particular season?' The following are examples of the responses:

'I don't think the organisation or how I experience it comes into it really, I don't think about having a relationship with the organisation because it is a bit faceless but now when I think again, of course I do.'

'My experience of the organisation could be different from the coachee; we don't talk about my experience; we talk about their experience.'

'This is about the culture of the organisation and I suppose it does matter because it impacts on the coachee; I guess I just accept it and not let it get in the way of the work.'

'For me it is about acceptance, every organisation has a feel to it; I just accept that as a truth, if the coachee brings it up, I work with what is going on for them.'

When asked to describe their perception of coachees using the same metaphor, four out of eight answered 'autumn', three said 'winter' and one said 'spring'. When asked what it was like to work with a coachee whom they experienced as the season they identified, the following responses were given:

'I chose autumn because I sense that the people I am working with are dying off in some way, or at least part of them is and they need time to regenerate; they need help to do that'

'I said autumn because the work I am doing is about helping to prepare the ground, there is a sense of the good times being in the past and they are having to prepare for something else.'

'I am perhaps being influenced by the work that I have done in the last year which has been a time of huge change but I really see coachees as winter, closed down and doing what you have to do to survive. That sounds bleak when I say it; it is not meant to.'

'Spring is how I am experiencing coachees at the moment and that is a bit of a generalisation but if I focus on the work in this organisation there has been a change in the last six to eight months; the people I am working with are much more hopeful, it is as though they are getting more sun and more daylight.'

When asked what it was like for them to work with a coachee who they experienced as that season they all said it made no difference. Despite this, these are examples of the responses:

'All coachees challenge me in some way, so I am not sure that it makes any difference to the relationship, I just accept that they are where they are.'

'Winter is hard work for me because I am completely opposite; I have a positive energy, so yeah I find it tough and I do get a lot of supervision on understanding myself in relation to the coachee.'

'Well I said winter and that is true for me, it is not that they are cold or dark, there is just dullness, you know like they have lost their edge. That sounds negative it is not meant to because the people I work with have all been willing to go with the process and to genuinely engage. I have to keep myself upbeat because if I think it could get me down.'

'My spring coachees are easier to work with than autumn or winter but I am not sure why I make that assumption. Sometimes I experience my spring coachees like uncontrollable lambs bouncing around the field, they can be hard to corral.'

Participants were asked to describe how they experienced the sponsors (line managers) who are part of the coaching contract as if they were a season. Four answered 'winter'; three 'autumn' and one 'spring'. These are examples of the responses to the follow-up question:

'There are like little shoots trying to break through hard ground.'

'There is general darkness to their mood.'

'They don't seem to be getting any light.'

'There is a sense of growth and hope.'

'It is like they know they have to plant something and nourish it but they don't know what to plant.'

When asked what it was like for them to work with a sponsor who they experienced as that season, they gave the impression they did not see this as of much relevance. They were, however, able to identify some challenges of working with these sponsors. The following are examples of the responses:

'It can be hard to work to get a contract with measurable outcomes with a manager who seems to have lost their way. So, I suppose what it is like for me is tough; I think I do a lot of work in the contracting arena.'

'The relationship is really with the coachee not the sponsor, so given that I might only have two or three meetings with the coachee where the sponsor is present, I don't think it matters how I experience them.'

"Sometimes, I want to suggest to the sponsor that he gets coaching; he is giving support to this team members but I don't see him getting support.'

'Spring sponsors are easier to work with to get a contract, they are more hopeful and I get a sense that coaching is seen as a positive intervention rather than the "last chance saloon" because they don't know what to do.'

Participants were asked to consider accountability, authority and power in the context of the coaching process. They articulated with ease their accountability but were resistant to the concept that they may be perceived as an authority figure or a powerful person in the relationship.

Focus on the unconscious process

Participants were invited to reflect on how the perceptions they have shared might influence their work as a coach. In response to these questions, six out of eight said they did not think it did, although they found it interesting to explore the areas using metaphor. These six said their coach training helped them to notice perceptions and taught them how to keep them out of the way of the coaching process. These are some of the responses:

'There is no impact on the work I do; I have learned to keep my thoughts and feelings out of the process.'

'As an internal coach, you have to pay attention to the voice inside that tells you the coachee is right, particularly when you have had a similar experience yourself but you must make sure you don't collude with the coachee.'

'I just don't get into my own thoughts when I am coaching; I always prepare really well and clear my mind before I start.'

'If you look at the competences, you can see the sort of behaviour that needs to be displayed to get a professional qualification and I think I was taught to keep my behaviour appropriate and to keep my views to myself.'

When asked how their experience of the organisation might be influencing the coaching process, all the participants commented on the importance of understanding culture in the organisation. I asked how they felt about the organisation, and this was the one occasion when I discerned a difference between the response from internal coaches and external coaches. Some internal coaches spoke with passion about how the organisation had changed, was expecting much more of people and seemed to have lost its way. They said the organisation now was not the organisation they had joined. When asked how this might be impacting their work, each of them said they did not think it did. Reference was again made to the organisation being external to the process. The external coaches said that they noticed different challenges in the different organisations they worked with and could comment on the culture of different organisations. I did not hear what they said as judgemental, rather as their observations. They commented on the challenges employees were facing in the light of the changes being made to organisational structure and the introduction of key performance measures.

They were asked to think about the contracting process and how their experience of the coachee and sponsor manifested behaviourally. The following are examples of the responses:

'It is tough when you get a winter coachee and a winter sponsor; I notice that now as I think about it, I think it makes me be even more positive and probably irritates them. But you asked about them, it is low energy and we'll give this a go and hope for the best.'

'I have winter and spring combinations at the moment and that can be challenging. When the sponsor is winter it is hard to get them to engage and it seems to drag the coachee down and it is hard to get a commitment of support from the sponsor.'

'I am experiencing coachees as autumn and sponsors as spring and I get a sense of frustration from the sponsors that the coachees are not growing fast enough for them. I pick up a sense of desperation from the sponsor.'

'It is positive energy for me and I respond to positive energy so I am probably more drawn to whichever one is spring.'

I asked them to reflect on how this might impact on how they manage the contracting process and the theme that came through was the contracting process was generally hard work. One person realised that the more difficult the experience, the more positive she became, and said she most probably tries to get the others enthused. Another person recognised she was drawn to the person whose behaviour manifests itself more positively and reflected how she could become irritated in the contracting session in the face of negativity and pays attention to how she deals with the person who is negative. The other participants said the contracting process was important and they had been taught to keep it as clean as possible. They reported taking challenges or problems they had to supervision.

What emerged in this part of the interview was that in 75% of the cases, the participants experienced coachees as not feeling good about themselves or the organisation at the start of the coaching process but reported that this changed as they worked through the issues facing them. When asked how this might influence the work they did, six out of the eight said they did not believe it did, saying they had views on the organisation but they were able to keep them out of the coaching arena. These six reframed the question and answered from the perspective of their view of the organisation rather than how their experience of the coachee might influence how they work. The other two said that they could empathise with coachees who were experiencing problems but believed they did without judgement of the coachee, the sponsor or the organisation.

Analysis of focus on idealised self

My experience of the first part of the process was the coaches answered these questions with ease and the information was readily accessible to them. Listening to the answers, it seemed this was the sort of 'script' they use to explain the purpose of coaching, the coaching process, how they work as a coach and what the organisation gains from coaching to potential coachees. I experienced this as a presentation of how they think they should be, the idealised self, and, consequently, who they believe they are.

What I noticed when participants were invited to reflect using metaphor was they stepped into a more reflective space and took longer to answer the questions. In interpreting the responses, I noticed the participants described themselves in a positive way, and the organisation, the coachee and the sponsor in a more negative way. I had a sense of hopefulness about themselves as coaches and the coaching process whilst the other parties to the relationship were presented as 'hopeless'. My sense is that they saw the coaching process and themselves as a source for good in what they perceived as challenging times in the organisation.

In listening to their descriptions, my interpretation is that their unconscious mind held them in a position above the other parties, and I was left thinking there was an element of discounting and grandiosity.⁴ The voice tone, tempo and body language caused me to sense the participants believe their actions and words empower others and create a significant catalyst for change in the world in which they operate. On the one hand, the coach needs to believe they can be a positive force for change and that it is good to be both confident and competent in their work. On the other hand, if this belief is not surfaced and dealt with in awareness, they may unconsciously co-create an authority relationship with the coachee based on power and powerlessness.

I found most of the participants resistant to the concept that their experiences as defined by metaphor would have any impact on the work they did. The metaphors were starting to draw out the mental constructs that were informing their perceptions and it is difficult to see how these would not inform behaviour and, thus, their interventions in the coaching process.

My curiosity was raised by the resistance and I was left with a sense the participants were protecting something personal to them. This is understandable – they have chosen to train

⁴ Discounting (Schiff et al. 1975) – blanking out of some aspects of the situation. Grandiosity (Schiff et al. 1975) – exaggeration of some feature of reality

for and work in a particular role. The responses at this stage led me to consider what had emerged was an enactment of a role, with the unconscious mind reflecting 'this is how I must be seen.' I did not believe they were 'hiding' anything but rather explaining their perception, ergo their reality, ergo their experience. I found it interesting that six of the eight participants could not conceive they were anything other than fully present with their coachees, moment by moment, without any intrapersonal process dynamics or intrapsychic experiences influencing them. They reported being fully aware and conscious in the moment, which I believe is their truth. If we look at the coaching competence of 'presence', it means more than being fully aware and conscious in the moment; it means deep listening and going beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense of the world. This suggests to me that the participants' preconceptions and way of making sense of the parties to the contract must impact on their presence and, ultimately, on their work.

Given that every organisation is an emotional and simultaneously interpersonal place, they arouse complex emotional responses which are likely to impact on relationships. I was interested to move to the next stage to see what emerged, particularly since the use of symbolic representation is a key part of the next stage of the research.

Stage 2 interviews - The authentic self

At this stage, two interview participants were asked to choose symbols in the form of children's toys to explore their experience of themselves, the coachee, the sponsor, the organisation and the coaching process. The participants were asked at this stage to focus their attention on one specific set of relationships.

Focus on self

Participants were asked to choose a toy (from a range of around 60 toys) to represent how they experience themselves in the coaching relationship. No two coaches chose the same symbol. The following symbols were chosen:

- Mickey Mouse (as a magician)
- A helicopter
- The fairy godmother
- A torch
- A bus (coach)
- A bat
- An ear
- A nose

They were asked, 'In what way do you experience yourself as similar to ... (symbol named)?' I noted that six of the participants laughed when they reflected on this question. The following are examples of the responses:

'I chose the helicopter because I am part of the contract and the organisation but I am above the situation that the coachee is in, so I am hovering and getting an overview of what is going on. I think that is true of all my coaching relationships not just this one.'

'I am a torch, because my job is to shine a light on the situation to help the coachee see a pathway. I think maybe it is more than that though when I think about this relationship because the organisation, the sponsor and the coachee are in a dark place; they need light.'

'Well I chose the bus a bit tongue-in-cheek but actually because of the bus/coach connection, but as I look at this bus, I think about this relationship as a journey and I am driving the bus but the coachee is map reading, and I think the sponsor created the map with the coachee.'

'When I look at this bat, I suppose I think about radar and for me I think its intuition, I think I am using my intuition to navigate the coaching process.'

'It sound a bit passé to say I am an ear, but coaching is about listening, active listening and now I am wondering if I am being a bit passive.'

'I was drawn to the nose because I think I am a naturally nosey person but as I hold this and look at it; I am also thinking about this relationship because I am being a bit of a bloodhound, sniffing around, using my senses to help the coachee find what they need to find.'

The two who had chosen the cartoon/fairy tale character answered as follows:

Mickey Mouse: *'I am moving away from Mickey Mouse because it seems a bit egotistical and you might think I am full of myself.'* *'I have to own up to feeling a little bit magical.'*

Fairy godmother: *'Oh I don't think I like that; do I really believe I grant people's wishes? And I am wondering if this is just in coaching?'*

From words, voice tone, tempo and body language, I sensed that these two participants were shaming themselves as they explored their choice of character.

The interviews moved on to a deeper exploration, always using the participants' language to form the next question. Examples of transcripts are given in Appendix 7 so that the reader may see how the reflection and narrative emerged.

I was mindful at each stage to assure the participants I was curious and not judging them. I took my own imago to supervision to clarify I was being true to my word.

Focus on relationships

As we progressed through the session, the participants were asked to choose a toy to represent the coachee. The following choices were made:

- A cat
- A mouse (two chose this toy)
- A soldier
- A lion
- A wheel
- A chicken
- A monkey

They were asked, 'In what way do you experience the coachee as similar to this ... (symbol named)?' The following are the responses:

'She has that look of inner knowing but she doesn't give anything away, a bit like the Cheshire cat from Alice in Wonderland.'

'The mouse because she is timid.'

'This might seem like an odd explanation because you tend to think of mice as being timid, and she is not bold but she is resourceful and she doesn't get caught out, she would never try to take the cheese from a trap.'

'I picked the lion but it is not just any lion, it is the lion from the Wizard of Oz. He has courage but he doesn't believe he has.'

'A wheel may seem like a strange choice but I feel like this coachee is a wheel that has come off, you know, he was on a solid vehicle and suddenly he came off and is rolling down the road.'

'I don't mean she is chicken in the sense that she is a coward; it is more that she is running around scratching the surface trying to dig something up.'

'He is a monkey, curious, clever, a little bit mischievous and persistent.'

'In two ways I suppose. Sometimes he is just soldiering one and other times he is in battle.'

When the participants were asked to choose a symbol to represent the sponsor, the following choices were made:

- A helicopter
- A group of trees
- A mouse
- A cowboy with a rifle
- A pirate (two people chose this toy)
- Kermit the frog
- A submarine

They were asked, 'In what way do you experience the similar as similar to this ... (symbol named)?' The following are the responses:

'The sponsor is a helicopter in this relationship; because he is engaged in the mission but not involved in the detail. The noise from the rotors is always there but it is not interfering, it is just background noise.'

'The sponsor in this relationship is a group of trees, solid, grounded and offering shelter but it is possible to lose my way with this sponsor.'

'I am picking the mouse; the sponsor comes across as timid, quiet and a bit compliant. She disappears back into the mouse hole – no that last part that isn't my experience; that is my judgement based on what the coachee tells me. But I am sticking with timid, quiet and compliant.'

'The cowboy because the he is strong, a bit tough and can defend himself and others; but he is also a little bit threatening.'

'I chose the pirate because this sponsor is a little bit outside of the "law"; he says and does what he thinks is right and isn't too concerned about playing by the rules.'

'I like the pirate as a way of describing my experience of this person; it sounds like a cliché but she seems to be permanently on the hunt for buried treasure but she doesn't show anybody the map; maybe there is no map.'

'Kind, gentle, empathic and a little insecure about himself, that is my experience – definitely Kermit the frog.'

'I feel a little bit guilty choosing this but I picked this because it really does explain my experience, he is a silent warrior, under the surface most of the time and I never know when he is going to surface.'

The participants were asked to look at the toy, to notice their thoughts and feelings and to say anything else they wanted to say. Seven said they had nothing more to add. The eighth person said, *'I have to confess I would never have believed I could get so much insight from this and I am not sure that I like it; it is making me think of my shortcomings.'* At this stage, I asked what the participant needed to stay with the process. She replied, *'I don't need anything but I think I will be more thoughtful of what I take to supervision.'*

When asked to choose a toy to represent the organisation, the following choices were made:

- A train (three people chose this toy)
- A bulldozer (two chose this toy)
- A bull (one chose this toy)
- A truck and trailer (one chose this toy)
- A fox (one chose this toy)

They were asked, *'In what way do you experience the organisation as similar to this ... (symbol named)?'* These were the responses:

'The organisation is a train for me, because there is this mighty powerhouse locomotive out in front, knowing where it is going and dragging all the carriages behind it.'

'I think the train is a good symbol for me because the organisation is on a journey and the driver and guards are up front and they know where they are going but the carriages are full of passengers, who are more or less engaged in the journey, the further back the train they sit, the less they know about the destination.'

'I have picked the train and I have got a bit of a block as to the reason for that choice. No, I know why. This organisation is going somewhere; the driver knows where and is asking people to trust him; some people are excited and some are scared. I am not clear if I am seeing this from a coaching perspective or an employee of the organisation (participant pauses for reflection). I can't separate the two but I don't think it matters; but I am excited about the journey and my coachee is scared.'

'Oh, I don't like the idea that the organisation as a bulldozer; it has negative and positive connotations for me. But when I hold this in my hand, I get a strong sense of it being positive, so I am sticking with it. The organisation is clearing a new path for itself so that it can build something better and more functional. And if I am being honest then I so think it just mows down anything in its way.'

'It's a bulldozer; full throttle; nothing stopping it and woe betide anything that gets in the way.'

'I am surprised I have chosen a bull and I want to be clean in giving you my reasons for this. I experience this organisation as strong and powerful but a little dangerous if you get in its way.'

'My hand immediately went to the truck and trailer and that is because the organisation is on the move with a couple of people up front taking control and the trailer has all the resources in it; and I mean both human and other resources. I want to make the truck go at speed to show how I am experiencing it and how things and people are dropping; you know getting left behind in its haste.'

'I've chosen the fox and I just want to make sure I am looking at this from a coach perspective not from the perspective of my day job, so I am going to choose another toy, if that is okay so that I can separate the two, but I will just talk about one. Yes, it is the fox, the organisation is agile and very active but it is a bit manipulative.'

The participants were asked to choose a toy to represent the coaching process and the following choices were made:

- Dora the Explorer
- Wizard
- Cat (3)
- Hunter
- Spade (2)

They were asked, 'In what way do you experience the coaching process as similar to this ... (symbol named)?' These were the responses:

'Well, if you know Dora's story then you will know that she goes round in a cycle of facing obstacles, riddles and puzzles and overcomes them all in the end.'

'There is a magical element to the process.'

'Well, it is curiosity that sums it up for me.'

'There is mystery and curiosity in the coaching process, a bit like my cat.'

'The similarities with the cat are there is detachment in the process but lots of curiosity.'

'Coaching is a process of hunting for clues, solutions, understanding.'

'I chose the spade because it is a process of digging and digging to pull up roots or digging for buried treasure.'

'The spade which is digging for buried treasure.'

I invited deeper exploration of the participants' choices and I will return to this later in the section, which offers information on the unconscious process

Explaining the concept of group imago, I asked them to arrange the toys to represent the relationships, paying attention to who they felt close to and who they felt distant from. I asked them to be as spontaneous as possible and not to overthink this piece.

Five of them did this within seconds and the other three took several minutes, often rearranging the positions. My hypothesis is there may have been an element of trying hard to get it right, which was getting in the way of an instantaneous response.

- Five of the eight put the coach and coachee at the centre of the relationship, side by side.
- The other three also put the coach and coachee at the centre, facing each other.
- Five of them had the organisation on the periphery of the imago.
- Two had the organisation quite distant and ahead of the rest of the players.
- The remaining person had the organisation moving around and in between the other parties to the relationship.
- Three of the participants had the sponsor alongside the coach and coachee, although a little more distant from them.
- One had the sponsor next to the organisation and on the periphery.
- One had the sponsor facing away from the coach and coachee and between them and the organisation.
- One had the sponsor between the coach and coachee.
- The remaining two had the sponsor behind the coach and coachee.

Once they had arranged their imago, I asked them, 'What is your reaction when you look at this?' and six replied that they thought it was a true or accurate reflection of how they were experiencing the relationship with the various parties. The following are examples of what was said:

'I think it really is a true reflection of my experience, the train (organisation) is holding everything together but in a constraining way.'

'It is a pretty accurate picture.'

'True reflection but a bit mind blowing.'

'Captures it for me but I wouldn't have got there using words.'

'It is an interesting picture but I am on the ground rather than hovering above the situation.'

'That does sum it up.'

Two seemed a little defensive and said:

'Well, it is what I would expect; of course I am closer to the coachee; that is who I am doing the work for.' (This in itself is an interesting comment in the choice of words 'work for' rather than 'work with'.)

'It's natural for me to be closer to the coachee. I barely see the line manager and I'm not employed by the organisation so why would I be close to it?'

The imago was then used to further explore the subordinate theme, 'Focus on the unconscious process'.

Focus on the unconscious process

I return here to a semi-structured interview style, using laddering questions which were dependent on how the participant answered the first question.

They were asked to look at the relationships with each party in depth and to say something about the way in which they were experiencing the person as the symbol they had chosen. (See Appendix 7 for sample transcripts.) A significant amount of data was generated at this stage and it is not possible to document it all. I have, therefore, chosen to limit the number of direct quotes and focus more on my analysis of what the participants were reporting. The following are examples of the responses:

'The thing that stands out for me is the visual impact of this and how far away the organisation is from the coaching relationship. So, I am seeing the organisation as distant. This seems okay but I am thinking that it is possible that I forget about the organisation.'

'It is myself I am really looking at here, just where I have placed myself between the coachee, the sponsor and the organisation and right now I see myself as some sort of protector.'

'What I notice is not surprising; it is how close I am to the coachee and how far away I have placed the organisation and the sponsor.'

'This is not to do with the imago, but I am really uncomfortable right now; which is not a bad thing; it is just making me wonder what I might be missing.'

'I want to start again, because I don't like what I have created. But there must be something in this.'

All the participants declared a close relationship with the coachee, which is hardly surprising given the relational nature of coaching and the need for chemistry between the pair to facilitate the work they do together. At the first stage interviews, the participants were confident that they could hold the process and maintain equality in the relationship with the various parties to the contract. What emerged, however, is that they were less confident that this was the case when they used symbolic representation to create the metaphoric landscape.

Their experience of the organisation was less positive than their experience of the coachee and my hypothesis is that their picture is clouded by what they were hearing from the coachee as the coaching process unfolded. Thus, their experience was influenced by the coachee's experience. This may be less true for internal coaches than for external coaches given that they have their own day-to-day experience of the organisation. This raises the potential issue of the internal coaches being unable to separate their experience of the organisation from the perspective of their substantive role of their experience as a party to the coaching contract. The organisation was generally portrayed in a more negative light, although what was said about the organisation almost always had the caveat of the organisation having no choice because of the external powers creating challenges for them. Generally, I sensed that when pushed to consider their experience of the organisation, there was a discomfort in saying anything that could be construed as critical and so the 'blame' was laid elsewhere, for example, with political masters. This suggests a defence against anxiety, as described by Jacques (1953) and referred to in Chapter Two.

The following are examples of the comments that were made about the organisation in response to the question, 'What is it about the organisation that causes you to experience it as ... (symbol named)?'

'It is the speed of the train and the size of it; it is almost out of control, like a runaway train, with the carriages being tossed from side to side. I have been working with a coachee who has had three different line managers in four months.'

'The organisation is ploughing a particular furrow and it is interesting that I chose a bulldozer and not a tractor; I think that is because I am experiencing the organisation as pushing through and shifting anything in its path to one side.'

'The organisation is big and powerful and at the moment it charges at anyone who challenges it.'

'I think the organisation is agile (metaphor of a fox) and it has to be in the context of what is being expected but manipulative not in a trying to catch folk out sort of way; more in a persuasive you have to do this or else sort of way.'

I sensed as they reflected on their experience as they described it using the symbols, there was an inner conflict from a place of feeling disloyal to the organisation. I picked this up more from voice tone, tempo and body language than words.

The reporting of the relationship with the sponsors suggests that, in the main, they are perceived as victims of the organisational change process. The key theme that came through was the sponsors were doing the best they could in the circumstances and although with positive intent, they were often misguided in their expectation or support of the coachee. I think it is important to note that the participants meet the sponsors on a maximum number of three occasions, for short periods of time, and so have limited interaction with them. I think in a general sense, the participants are somewhat unconsciously influenced by how they experience the sponsors in the contracting and review meetings but perhaps more so by what the coachee says about the sponsor in the coaching process. The following quotes illustrate how I arrived at the foregoing analysis:

'The sponsor has limited power; he just has to implement the changes that he is told to by the executive team.'

'I think the sponsor just wants me to fix the coachee; when I look at this, I am experiencing her as helpless.'

'The sponsor as distant but I get a sense that he is looking after the coachee's back.'

'I have got a strong view of the sponsor despite the fact that so far I have only met her once, so maybe I am over-reacting as to how she was in the contract meeting. She comes up a lot in the coaching sessions though.'

'My experience is based on one meeting so far and I felt he had very high expectations of the coachee, and I didn't see it at the time, but I think I felt a little angry because it was hard to get him to commit to supporting the coachee in the work environment.'

'I think I might be seeing the sponsor in this relationship based on my experience of him in my other role. Maybe that is just how I see him generally; I am not sure it can be different.'

'It's tough. In the contracting session and mid-point review I never got a sense of really understanding what his expectations are.'

In relation to the coachee, the participants declared positive experiences, although five of the eight said that this did not mean the coaching process was easy. They identified points of resistance but thought their choice of symbol represented this and could describe the more negative aspects of the symbol as they experienced the coachee. The following are examples of responses:

'She is a bit mysterious and unpredictable. I find her hard to read sometimes.'

'She can be very engaged and for no apparent reason, moves away from me and becomes aloof.'

'I experience him as very engaged in the process, but that reflects where he is now rather than when we started. Actually when I look at the toy I chose, rather than a wheel he is a vehicle with a missing wheel, part of him has been lost and he does reflect this each time we meet.'

'The timidity is to do with lack of confidence to do the job; the organisation has been turned upside down this has created low confidence and demotivation. I find it hard to keep going sometimes.'

At stage one, I was left with a sense of the participants experiencing the coachee as powerless in relation to the sponsor and the organisation but that in the coach/coachee, relationship power was equally distributed. In response to questions related to authority, accountability and power, there seemed to be a significant shift at stage two. Five of the participants made connections between the choice of toys and the imago they had created, realising they were perhaps taking on more accountability than their role

required. They noticed the size and shape of the symbols and started to make connections with the perceived power they had in the relationship.

Regarding the remaining three participants, my interpretation of their choices for themselves and their exploration of the choice suggested that they unconsciously experience themselves as powerful. Aligning this with their choices for the coachee, which seem to me to be less powerful, it is difficult to accept that the reality of the relationship is one of equals, although that is not to say that it does not become so.

When the focus turned to inviting reflection on how the participants were making meaning of the relationships based on the imago, what emerged across the board was that they were looking at the relationships in more depth and starting to understand the unconscious mind was at work all the time. The participants all said that they were uncovering information that hitherto had not been available to them, although there were varying degrees of emerging information. Two people declared their anxiety as they started to derive meaning through the reflective process:

'I feel quite scared when I look at this; the coachee and I are quite exposed. I don't feel a burden of responsibility when I am in the coaching process but I do when I look at this.'

'What I am seeing from this is that the organisation and the sponsor are really not in the loop, and they are not in the coaching process of course, but I am wondering if I am taking on a lot of responsibility here. Something has to be happening because I see it like this.'

The following are examples of comments from other participants:

'I am seeing the relationship in a different light; I think I might be taking on the role of rescuer. I am really getting in touch with how I feel about the organisation and I still think that might be to do with being an internal coach.'

'I suppose I thought I was maintaining an equal relationship with all of them keeping an eye on the coachee, the sponsor and the organisational needs; I am not so sure now. Looking at my imago, I don't have the organisation or the sponsor in my line of vision.'

'I don't know what to think, but I do feel resistant to exploring this further, this is throwing up information that is causing me to question my practice.'

'How am I making meaning? This is a powerful process for me, I have not done this before and there is so much information to reflect on. I just know that I am getting a different perspective on the work with this person in this organisation.'

'What this is making me realise is that there are aspects of the organisation; the sponsor and even the coachee that I don't like. And that sounds terrible, but I don't know why I should be surprised. The question you will no doubt ask is how is it affecting my work.'

'I am getting a different take on my work and I sort of find this a bit freeing, I am just going with the process and not judging myself. It is a journey much the same as the coaching journey.'

The symbolic representation and the creation of a metaphorical landscape did the job they were intended to do. The symbolic modelling is a creative act, in that it depends on unconscious resources and encourages the relaxation of controls and modes of ideation which defy verbal logic and common sense. The participants fully engaged in this process and discovered their codes of disciplined reasoning had been suspended. What happened when they started to derive meaning from the imago was their mental constructs changed because they relaxed the controls of their beliefs about themselves and the coaching process. This created for six of the eight of them a disequilibrium, the foundation of their self-perception and self-presentation being shaken. I had a sense that this stage in the research process had induced a creative break in their habitual patterns, which resulted in new ways of thinking, perceiving and being in the coaching world.

The participants were invited to consider the relationships and processes. They were starting to understand that these might be influenced by the unconscious process. I think what happened at this stage is they moved out of reflecting on the symbols and into thinking about what might be happening in the coaching process. I encouraged them to hypothesise from the perspective of how their patterns of perception based on the imago might be influencing their work.

They were invited to reflect on the interplay between the coach and the other parties to the contract. What emerged was they started to discover how their experience of each symbol's function related to the overall landscape and how the configuration of symbols and relationships encodes symbolic significance. They started to see how the intention of the symbols can be fulfilled in both helpful and unhelpful ways. The participants articulated their hypotheses with relative ease once they could stand back from judging themselves.

They could see the potential for conflict, dilemma and impasse in the process. This allowed them to 'step outside' the conceptual constraints that were potentially limiting them. The following are examples of some of the comments made by the participants:

'I can see that I might be over-focussed on the coachee's agenda and not paying attention to the sponsor and the organisation.'

'I can understand that what we do in the coaching process has an impact on the relationship between the coachee and his line manager. I can make sense of something the coachee said in a recent session about the line manager being more distant than usual.'

'When I try to share my thoughts on the sponsor's perspective, I can see that the coachee potentially thinks I am taking sides against her.'

'I have felt on two occasions that the sponsor was wary or suspicious of me and it could be that he is picking up the close relationship I have with the coachee and feeling threatened by it.'

I asked each participant to say something about how they were experiencing the process. The following are examples of the responses:

'I have never done this before and I am amazed at what I am learning about myself. I feel surprised and little scared.'

'This is fascinating, I've used this sort of technique with coachees and I know it gets results but it is a whole different experience being on the receiving end. I like it though, so I feel pleased.'

'I feel a little stupid, I think I am very self-aware but now when I start to look in depth, actually I am not so sure. I am okay with this though, it is a very interesting process.'

'I feel sad in some ways, all this information from one small toy and I have never tapped in to it. I can look on the bright side though; I think I am going to get a lot from this experience.'

'I think this is amazing.'

I noticed that four out of the eight participants started with a 'thinking' response and assumed this was their preferred mode of communication and so it allowed them to reframe the question. I brought their attention back to what they were noticing about how they felt having expressed their thoughts. The mood at the end of six of the interviews was reflective, yet energised with participants sharing how they had found the process rewarding and enlightening. Two participants said they had found it challenging and were creating a different picture of themselves as coaches. I checked what this meant for them and they both reported that it was a positive experience, with one saying:

'I am still quite new to coaching and I think this is helping me to get real and understand coaching in a different way.'

The following are examples of what the other participants had to say:

'I suppose I notice that the main feeling is curiosity, I think the next stage when I bring a coaching recording, will really give me some information on how this is actually impacting on my work.'

'It is enlightening and frightening. But it is good at both levels; it can only help to make me a better coach.'

'Powerful, insightful, a little scary. I feel a little scared that there is so much going on that I wasn't aware of but I'm okay, it is just data.'

'I feel energised, like I have discovered so much and there has to be some good learning in this, I think that will emerge when I reflect a bit more after this session and when I listen to the transcript.'

'If I am being honest, I am little anxious about how I might be letting my unconscious get in the way of work, but then this is about reflection so I am going to hang on to that and see what comes up in the next session.'

'I feel quite excited really, almost like a child going on a trip. I have no idea what I am going to learn next but I am already paying attention to what I have noticed today.'

'I have run a gamut of emotions during this session today, and I wanted to be sceptical and I haven't been able to. Right now I feel good because I am confident I do good work and this is just information to help me improve.'

I paid attention to the body language, voice tone and tempo as I listened to these responses and sensed there was congruence between what they were saying and how they were saying it. I experienced them as though they had lost sight of the fact they were engaged in a research process and much more focussed on this experience as a developmental intervention.

At any point in the conversation, where I had a concern about participants feeling negative or judging themselves, I raised this with them. I constantly invited them to stay curious about what was emerging in the session, and when I heard them judge themselves or suggest that what they thought I might be thinking, I was careful to deal with this rather than let it go.

Analysis of focus on the authentic self

I have offered my analysis of what emerged at this stage in the research, as described in the narrative above. This second stage interview process encouraged the participants to look deeper at themselves, the relationships they have with the parties to the contract and the potential impact on their work. The symbols they chose gave a sense of what might be held in their unconscious minds. The process allowed them to see that in their choice of symbols, they were telling their story in a different way and, I believe, a more authentic way. The symbols they chose gave strong clues about what they regarded as having value, goodness, and use in its own right or, indeed, the opposite. The way in which they could articulate how they experienced the symbols as empowering, mystical, protective, magical, dangerous, threatening and so on indicated the role and function of that symbol for them. All the symbols served a purpose in both the relationship and the process. The emerging information the participants were accessing had the potential to be useful to them at some point under some conditions. The placing of the symbols allowed the participant to reflect on the perceived distance between the parties to the relationship. It emerged that undoubtedly the coach/coachee relationship is a close one, with the other relationships being more distant. What did not emerge was information on whether this helped or hindered the work or the outcome of the coaching process.

I think the key learning from this part of this process is that we all have an unconscious mind which has the potential to influence what we say and do. The material generated identified the participants having a psychological level to the relationship with the parties and the coaching contract. The symbolic representation surfaced how the participants were seeing and experiencing the other parties to the contract, the unconscious and, therefore, the unspoken beliefs they hold. If we consider the establishment of the coaching contract creates a 'coaching world', the data emerging at this point reinforces

how the coach has an inner world or world within the coaching-world. If the coach has this inner world, then I believe it is safe to assume the other parties to the contract do also. The question that remains is the extent to which this creates an unconscious dynamic which influences the work being done.

Stage 3 interviews - The unconscious self

At this stage, participants were asked to bring along a 30-minute video recording of a session with the coachee they had reflected on during the second stage interview. They were asked to re-create their imago prior to listening the recording. As we watched the video, participants were asked to pay attention to the interaction between themselves and the coachee and to press the pause button if they noticed something they wanted to reflect on. They were asked to pay attention not only to words but also voice tone, tempo, gestures and body language. I believed it important to put the participant in charge of what they wanted to reflect on and trusted that any initial resistance I had experienced at stage one in the research to the concept that the unconscious mind might have an impact on their work had been overcome. What emerged in all but one of the interviews, however, was that the participant either expressed a concern that they might not notice anything or that they wanted me to pay attention and press the pause button to invite reflection. I agreed to this with the caveat that any reflection I invited them to do was at their discretion and they could say no. I experienced the participants as fully engaged and curious about their own process.

The participants varied in the number of times they paused for reflection, with the minimum number being four and the maximum, six. I requested a pause on two occasions with one of the participants. All the participants chose to pause the video within a period of six minutes from the start.

I advised participants they could choose to change any symbol in the imago and were free to recreate the metaphoric landscape in the light of the confronting reality as they watched the video.

The purpose of this stage is to invite participants to reflect on their work across multiple perceptions and patterns in the relationships. At this stage of reporting the results, I found it challenging to stay with the separation of the subordinate themes, mainly because of the dynamic process of indirect observation. In reality, the interviews were much more free-flowing, with the focus moving between the *self*, *relationships* and *the unconscious process*.

Focus on the self

My core questions were limited at the stage with questions following the participants' reflections. When participants paused the recording, I asked, 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?' All the participants paused the recording in what I would consider the 'contracting for the session' stage; so, they noticed that something changed early in the process regarding the interaction and this impacted on how they were experiencing themselves. The following are examples of what they noticed:

'So I am doing all the work, this is session three and she still comes to the session not knowing what she wants to get from it. I hear a slight edge to my voice when I listen to this. I think this is absolutely an example of me being Mickey Mouse as the magician, just keep on trying to perform the magic.'

'Look at my body language; I am not in the moment with him. This is what happens; he wants to tell me a long story and I want to stop him. I am not much of an 'ear'; I am not listening actively.' (Participant moves the symbol of the ear further away from the coachee).

'I stop myself from stopping him.'

'I am asking the standard questions to get the contract but I am using my intuition to get under the surface of what the real issue is for the coachee. I think that is an example of my 'bat like tendencies'. (Participant moves the symbol of the bat and places it on top of the coachee.) 'I am all over her at this stage and she goes quiet. I am flapping around her head.'

'Oh my goodness, listen to my fairy godmother coming out even at this stage I am asking what her three wishes are for this session. This session was recorded before we did the interviews the last time we met.'

'The coachee is telling me a story about what has been happening since we last met and it's to do with how he is fighting back against the organisation. I interrupt him twice when he is speaking.'

What emerged when I asked how they were experiencing themselves as they listened to their work was that some of them noticed they were displaying the characteristics of the symbol they had chosen to represent themselves even down to the choice of language

they were using. Others noticed that this was not so. One person decided to bring in a new symbol to represent the two sides of her in that moment. She chose a foot and said:

'I think at that moment I became a foot and wanted to stamp on him. I think he notices that I am not fully engaged because he starts to speak in a lower tone. I want to tell you what I could have done there and I won't because it is not relevant.'

I asked the participants what had changed in their imago and noticed even at this early stage in the sessions that some of the participants were changing their imago, which was seen, heard, felt or in some other way sensed that either reinforced or diminished their perception of themselves. Watching and listening to themselves at work seemed to trigger a reconfiguration of the imago and things that hitherto were vague, unknown or hidden emerged and were expressed. They were noticing how they were experiencing these moments and how this experience was impacting on them.

As the indirect observation continued, four of the participants said they there were no longer experiencing themselves as the symbol they had originally chosen. They were invited to choose something they thought better reflected how they were experiencing themselves. The following text gives examples of what emerged:

'I am not a magician with this person; I am a raging bull, ready to attack.'

'I am not an ear; I am a soldier.'

'I am not a fairy godmother; I am Thomas the Tank Engine.'

'I stop being a helicopter and I become a jaguar, I rush in and pull him away from the bulldozer.'

Posing further questions elicited the following responses:

'I am facing up to the fact that I am not a magician; and feeling frustrated, so I take up a different role; I become her protector, the raging bull that protects her; I am a fighter and that is mostly how I would describe myself in my day job.'

'I feel tired when I think about this; I am soldiering on with this person; this is a difficult contract for me but I persist and keep on going. I can hear my mother's voice saying, if at first you don't succeed try, try again.'

'I feel like I am a Thomas the tank engine; I am trying very hard to be useful, even when I think this is a bigger job than I can handle and that is quite typical of me. I don't give up and I don't speak up.'

'I imply danger in my question, "How might you be putting yourself in danger by doing that?". And he has never mentioned danger. The words rush out of my mouth and I am out of kilter with him, he is quite laid back.'

This suggests that in the second stage interviews, there may have still have been some *idealisation* of self as coach and it is possible now a clearer picture of the systemic role is emerging. One participant noticed that she had moved into what she described as the role she was more likely to take in her substantive position and this happened because of her not being able to take her *preferred* coach role. A second participant noticed that she may be obeying messages from her childhood, which necessitated her to keep going even if things are difficult. The third person seemed to be noticing a habitual pattern emerging in the session with the coachee. A fourth noticed that she was taking on too much responsibility and mentioned that she did this in her personal life.

The two who chose to stay with their original choice of symbol seemed to have less depth to their insights, with no sense of what was happening perhaps being due to their habitual patterns and mental constructs. The following text gives examples of how they responded to the question, 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'.

'This is awful; there is so much I could have done better.' (I noticed this participant reframed the question and I brought her attention back to what I had asked, she reframed again and said, *'I am not being helpful'*.)

'I am asking multiple questions and not giving the coachee a chance to answer.'

These answers indicate the participants were noticing what they were doing rather than what was happening in terms of their way of being. Their responses seemed to be focussed on the content of the session rather than on the intrapsychic and interpersonal processes.

They were encouraged to reflect on language, voice tone, tempo, breathing and body language to reconnect with the feelings at the time. Four of this six said that they found it

difficult to dissociate from how they were feeling, having watched and reflected on the video. I invited them to write down the feeling they were holding in the moment and to do something with the piece of paper that would allow them to reconnect with their feelings at the time. Five of the eight of them said that they could sum up their feelings now with one word but that it was not possible to do that when they reconnected with the feelings during the session. The following text gives examples of the responses:

'There is a range of feelings that I can reconnect with and I didn't express any of them openly in the session. I felt frustrated; disappointed; pleased and a little annoyed and all with myself.'

'Mostly frustrated, sometimes with myself and sometimes with the coachee. It is strange because I can't remember feeling frustrated in coaching; maybe I just don't let myself notice it. But when I look at my body language, I look frustrated.'

'The feeling I am reconnecting with is pleasure, I was pleased with how I experienced myself. Actually, I wasn't pleased, I was satisfied.'

'Satisfied, I mean looking at the session, there are things I could have done differently but that is the benefit of hindsight.'

'I am struggling not to superimpose how I feel now with what I have learned about myself from our conversation, so I can't answer the question.'

'Satisfied, that is all, and that is fairly common for me, I never come away from a session thinking that was brilliant. Now I am thinking that is because I am a very harsh self-critic.'

'I feel tired and I know that sometimes when this happens it is because I am really feeling something else and I shut down. I can hear a lack of energy in my voice and in see it in my body language.'

What I noticed about these responses was that the participants did not use authentic feeling descriptors⁵ but rather engaged in the thinking process, thus diluting the true feeling.

Focus on the relationship

A key part of working with metaphoric landscape is to develop questions to facilitate the *unwrapping* one at a time so that the metaphors can emerge into the light of awareness. This is designed to give the participants an opportunity to explore the moment in greater detail.

As we moved through this session, I naturally followed with questions about the participants' experience of the other parties to the contract as they referred to them in their reflections. At any time in the process, the participants could change or move the symbols to recreate the metaphoric landscape based on the confronting reality. It is important to note that the symbols and the relationships between them are not mutually exclusive and the emerging experience of one is likely to impact on the others. The same core questions were asked each time the recording was paused.

All the participants kept the same symbol to represent the organisation all the way through the session, and six of them rearranged the imago.

- Two of them moved the symbol from the periphery to the centre of the imago;
- Two had the symbol in constant motion, weaving in and out between all the other symbols; another participant moved the symbol between the sponsor and the coachee;
- One moved the organisational symbol alongside the symbol she had selected for herself and one moved the symbol closer to the coachee.

Examples of the responses to the question, What do you notice about how you were experiencing the organisation at that point?, are given below starting with those who made no change to the imago:

⁵ Authentic feelings – those feelings that young children experience such as anger, sadness, fear and joy before they learn to sensor them to be acceptable in the family (Berne, 1966).

'I am still experiencing the organisation as on the edge; it is around but not influencing what is going on.'

'It is interesting that the organisation is not in it for me, but I am not changing my opinion of it, so I am stuck with my original choice.'

The following are the replies from those who rearranged the imago:

'The organisation (truck and trailer) is right at the heart of what the coachee is dealing with.'

'I was quick to move the fox (between the sponsor and the coachee) and look at how I have orientated it, facing the coachee (the participant moves her symbol to get between the fox and the coachee). I was feeling that the organisation suddenly became a threat to the coachee and I moved in to protect her and even although I asked her how she could protect herself. She never mentioned feeling threatened.'

'It was something the coachee said and suddenly the train is in motion, and it is interrupting all the other relationships; I just want to rewind and listen again to what I said. (Participant rewinds the video and we watch it again.) I feel angry with the organisation when I listen to that part and I passed an opinion on what was going on in the organisation instead of asking a question.'

'The bulldozer is on the move in an erratic way.'

'I suddenly felt aligned with the organisation at this point, and I took a more defensive position. (Participant moves her symbol to face the organisation rather than the coachee.) That is interesting, because I did disconnect from the coachee at that point; I felt she was being unfair on the organisation.'

'The bulldozer has turned around and it is coming towards him.'

Reflecting on the sponsor, no one chose to change the symbol but all of them chose to move the symbol, thus rearranging the imago Vis:

- Three moved the symbol to the periphery of the imago and behind the organisation

- One moved the sponsor between herself and the coachee
- Two positioned the sponsor beside their own symbol
- One moved the sponsor out of the imago, and
- One moved the sponsor alongside the coachee

Examples of the responses to the question, 'What do you notice about how you were experiencing the sponsor at that point?', are given below:

'I am picking up that the sponsor is hiding behind the organisation and I am wondering if that is my experience or my interpretation of the coachee's experience.' (Participant reflects for a few seconds.) *'Actually I have had a realisation, I know that sponsor in a different context and when I listen to the coachee what I am thinking now is that person always hides behind the organisation and I was probably thinking that at the time; so my experience of the sponsor is not related to the coaching process, it is coloured by other experiences.'*

'I am influenced by what happened in a mid-point review session we had with the sponsor and he was hiding behind the organisation in that session and that is what I hear when I listen to this coaching session.'

'It was what the coachee said, I can't explain it but I just felt something in the moment and it was like the sponsor stepped in between us.'

'Oh I just felt empathy with the sponsor; I made a statement about what was probably going on for the sponsor, instead of asking a question.'

'Something happened in that last piece we watched, the sponsor had been out of the picture but suddenly came back in. I think that was because he hadn't been mentioned in the previous two sessions, it was like I suddenly remembered him.'

'It was when the coachee said the sponsor had left the organisation without any notice; I just took him out of the picture and I remember this vividly because it was only a few days ago; I felt scared that someone could be taken out so suddenly. I think I felt scared for the coachee and I felt protective so I am going to move my symbol between her and the organisation.'

'This session was just after the mid-point review; so, I think the sponsor was on my radar and we are talking about the review at that point. So, I think what happened was I noticed the sponsor was being more supportive of the coachee. It was most probably because of how I experienced him in the review and the fact that we were talking about the review. It could be me hearing the coachee being more positive about his experience and that is influencing me.'

Reflecting on the coachee, the responses at this stage tend to suggest there is more movement in the relationship between the coach and coachee than in the other relationships. All but two of the participants kept the same symbol, although they did report different characteristics of the symbol and different stages in the reflective process. The two who chose to change the symbol did so in response to a change at a point in the recording. All of them moved the symbol in the imago.

Participants were invited to reflect on how they were experiencing the coachee as they watched the video and paused for reflection. The following are examples of the responses from those who chose to keep the same symbol:

'She stopped being aloof at that point and became soft and warm; my experience at that point was that the 'cat' got closer to me and was being a little manipulative in a cat-like manner to get what she wanted and I moved away, I physically moved back in my seat and folded my arms; I never do that.' (The participant rearranges her imago at this point.)

'I think he got defensive when I asked that question and the soldier seemed to see me as the enemy.' (Participant moved her symbol closer to the coachee.) *I held my ground here but not in an aggressive way.'*

'She is a headless chicken at this stage; that is my experience. She is not scratching the surface trying to get something, she is running around and I am trying to catch hold of her. (The participant moves the two symbols and moves them around the imago in an erratic way.) *I can hear panic in her voice and I think I panicked; my voice tempo changed and I am asking multiple questions.'*

'The lion just got bolder there in that last piece; he made a commitment to do something different and he said that he felt bold and I didn't use his language I used my own and asked him how he had found his courage. (The participant moves her symbol and covers the coachee symbol.) I moved my symbol because I think I completely covered him there.'

'He disengaged with the process. (The participant moves the wheel to the periphery of the imago and away from all other symbols.) I am not sure what happened but I lost him completely and I can't remember that happening at the time. I want to watch the next piece to see what happened.'

'Something happened and the timid mouse roared; she got angry with me and that was a first. (The participant moves the mouse symbol further away and facing in the opposite direction.) There is a look of amazement on my face and I like how I handled it but it took some time for her to reconnect.'

These are examples of the responses from the two who choose to change the symbols:

'I am changing from the monkey to Dora the Explorer; I experienced her as letting go of that part of herself that she seemed to depend on for survival trusting that she could solve problem and overcome obstacles on her own. (The participant replaces one symbol with another and then decides to keep the two but brings Dora to the fore. She moves the coachee symbols further away from her and closer to the sponsor and the organisation.) I noticed that I look pleased at this point and I think I am a bit pleased with myself there.'

'I am changing the mouse for a butterfly. I had a very different experience of the coachee in that session; she had always been focussed and seemed to know where to sniff out the 'cheese' but in that moment she becomes a butterfly, settling and moving, settling and moving. And I think I am running around trying to catch her with my net but actually I am the helicopter so maybe I am trying to get her on the winch and rein her in. See how I am no longer still; I am leaning in towards her.'

The participants were asked to consider how what they were noticing was impacting on the relationships. They seemed to find it difficult to articulate their answers and it took longer to elicit responses. Five of them noticed they stayed closer to the coachee than to the other parties to the relationship; three of the five said something in justification of this.

Two of them reflected on whether this closeness to the coachee might move between being supportive yet being challenging and collusive. They offered this as a query they had rather than a statement of what had happened. Three of them commented that they had not really changed their perceptions of the organisation or sponsor and said that they were interested to note if that was the case. Four said the session had caused them to wonder if they were accepting the coachee's perception of the organisation rather than owning their own perception. These four are external coaches and so have less interaction with the organisation, which may be significant.

Focus on the unconscious process

The questions were asked in a free-flowing way, following the participants' process.

I invited the participants to note any new information about the coaching process, their own process and their work and to note anything that has been reinforced in these three areas. I reflected with some of the participants how I noticed they had used meta-comments,⁶ with statements such as:

- *'Something just shifted'*
- *'Something has come into focus'*
- *'This is important'*
- *'It's amazing'*
- *'It's like a bird's eye view'*

These statements suggest they were accessing information that was hitherto inaccessible. I was mindful that the purpose of this was to invite reflection on what had emerged for them and to stay in research mode to ascertain the extent to which they were able to access their unconscious self through surfacing their unconscious process. There was the potential at this stage for me to move into supervisory mode and use developmental questions to help them breathe more life into their metaphors. I wanted to invite reflection on whether they had become conscious of attaching symbolic significance to an aspect of their experience.

⁶ A meta-comment is a verbal or non-verbal expression, which refers to what has just been experienced (Lawley & Tompkins, 2003).

When asked what they noticed about the coaching process, all eight participants said they seen a shift in the way the coach and coachee interacted with each other. Four said that they had become more aware of congruence and lack of congruence between the words that were used and the accompanying voice tone, body language and gestures. This indicated to them that perhaps the relationships were not as transparent as they had thought. My interpretation of what was said by the six who had chosen to keep the same symbol for all parties to the relationship is that there is a strong potential for initial perceptions to stay fixed. The following are examples of the responses:

'I am surprised that I stayed with all of the same symbols, I am a bit worried about it, you know it is static and I wonder how open I am to a different experience.'

'I accuse the coachee of having a fixed way of seeing the world and I think I have fallen into the same trap.'

'My perceptions were very fixed, although I did manage to see different aspects of the coachee but not the sponsor or the organisation.'

'I suppose I am thinking that in the moment I am not aware of how dynamic the process is and you know you do what you do at the time maybe without paying too much attention to your gut feelings.'

'I was cynical about this process and almost determined to prove that I didn't let my thoughts and feelings get in the way. What I see now is that it is part of being human to have thoughts and feelings and it is impossible to suppress them. I guess the key thing for me about the coaching process is maybe to be more aware of my thoughts and feelings and to find a way to use them to help the coachee.'

'I think for me it is noticing that no matter how much I want to stick to my formula and believe that I can leave my perceptions outside the door, it is not possible, the whole process is too dynamic for that.'

'I was not convinced about this theory. I thought you could have got me to make meaning of any work or any relationship using symbols that has changed.'

'You know what has come up for me in this, how fixed I am in how I see the organisation and I am really curious about that. I mean we listened to a 30-minute recording and with any coachee I will work in 90-minute sessions. Am I naïve to think that my experience of the organisation doesn't get in the way?'

The two participants who chose not to change the symbols in response to what they saw and heard in the recording were interested that their self-perception remained the same and said this raised questions for them, given they had not identified the unhelpful characteristics of the symbol they had chosen. The following are examples of what they said:

'I think I am being a bit grandiose about myself, in fact I am embarrassed that I have painted myself in such a positive light because what came up in the session was that I am not magician.'

'I wonder what stops me from exploring what the dark side of my character might be; I think it appeared in the coaching process.'

Regarding choosing a different symbol for the coachee, they both said that they really did notice a very different experience at points in the recording and felt that was positive in that it showed they were not fixed and they allowed themselves to experience what was happening.

When I drew their attention to what they noticed about their own process, their responses ranged from shaming themselves for what they missed to curiosity about how they silenced themselves in the coaching process. All the participants commented on how they had silenced themselves or withheld what was happening for them in the coaching process. The following are examples of what they reported:

'I am surprised that I didn't say what I wanted to say at two points in the session. You know I was feeling frustrated and it definitely got in the way, I could have just declared it and asked the coachee how he was feeling.'

'I think I withheld in that session for fear of upsetting the coachee, and now I am wondering if that is a habit; I was definitely not as challenging as I like to think I am.'

'I could see and hear myself getting angry with the organisation in the session and I should have just declared my feelings; I think the coachee might have read that as me taking her side.'

'I think I missed a lot of signals in that session and I think it is because I do have this fairy godmother thing running; so I only do things to please this person and when I couldn't grant their three wishes, I got stuck.'

'Well I missed stuff in that session and I could have said what was going on for me and I didn't and I am okay with that. What I do realise is that I am not a helicopter; hovering above the situation; that sometimes something happens and I land and in that session, I landed right next to the coachee.'

'The biggest thing I notice about my own process is how hard it is to suspend my judgement; I just get into the old patterns. It is not there the whole time, but for a few moments on a few occasions in that session, it crept in.'

'I was really working quite hard to be the magician in that session; my process was about protecting that image with that coachee, and when the magic didn't work I took on a different persona. However, what is apparent is that my need to rescue was coming through loud and clear and I was going to do it by hook or by crook.'

'I think in some ways my symbol of the bat came through a lot in that session; I was really trusting my intuition and the moments of difficulty were when I tried to apply logic and ignore my intuition.'

When asked, 'What thoughts do you have about the impact of the unconscious mind on the coaching process?', the following responses were made:

'To be honest, I came in to this being a little sceptical but willing to give it a go. I leave knowing that there is a lot going on under the surface and I want to learn to pay more attention to that. If it is a happening to me then it must be happening to the coachee too.'

'What it tells me about my work is that, much as I hate to admit it, there is stuff at a deep level that influences me and the way I work. I am not saying it is good or bad, it is just there.'

'I have been very surprised by what has come up in this session; well all of the sessions but this one in particular; you know you can only defend your position for so long; the minute you put your work under the microscope the more difficult it is to claim that your perceptions and experiences don't influence what you do.'

'This has been a rich but if I am being honest an uncomfortable process for me, but I think I need to feel a bit of discomfort to learn anything. I know the research is not about what I learned but there was learning nevertheless.'

'I am not sure what it tells me about my work, I am a reflector, so I think the messages will emerge after I reflect a bit more. What it tells me at this stage is to be more aware of my perceptions and how they might get in the way.'

'It is not possible to be completely clean in my process; but I think I can clean up my act. You know maybe I should be doing the imago and using symbols in supervision to get more depth to my reflection.'

'I know the stuff about the psychological level of the contract and the idea of working with the unconscious mind, the theory of it, but this has made it real. It is around the whole time.'

Regarding authority and accountability, all the participants noticed there were occasions when they held accountability that was not theirs and occasions when they took on more responsibility than was theirs to take. This seemed to happen because of both the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. It also appeared to happen because of losing sight of the sponsor and the organisation in the relationship.

Analysis of focus on the unconscious self

In this part of the process, participants were asked to review an event after it had happened and to reflect on what they were noting in the review they had not noticed in the moment. In this context, they were engaged in retrospective detection or reflection-on-action. All the participants changed their metaphoric landscape; then they considered the attributes and location of the symbols. In each of the sessions, I noted that participants changed:

- The relationship between two symbols
- A change in the configuration of the symbols
- A change caused by the unfolding process
- A change in the pattern of the relationships

Each of these changes seemed to have its own logic of change and a change at one level influenced a change at other levels. In other words, the interaction between the coach and

coachee caused changes in the metaphoric landscape; thus, when something changes in the relationship between them, it caused a change in the relationship with the sponsor or the organisation. This movement of symbols and exploration of what was happening in the relationship allowed the participants to discover new information.

My analysis is that there is always a voice of judgement in the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. There was an initial belief held by these participants that they had the capacity to suspend judgement and the imposition of their pre-established frame of reference and mental models. The creation of a metaphoric landscape using symbolic representation challenged that belief and uncovered data that might otherwise not have been accessible.

Deeper levels of exploration seemed to create deeper levels of awareness both of themselves and the larger whole. I believed at the end of this process that the participants had shown a capacity for deeper seeing and the effects that this awareness had on their understanding, their sense of self and of others. I think the final session showed a depth of understanding about the unconscious process and its capacity to impact the work they do that I did not think was possible at the end of the first session. At the outset, the participants reported they were fully present and in the moment in the coaching process and yet by the end of the process realised this was not so and were able to own their preconceptions and historical ways of making sense of the coaching world.

Six of the eight participants reported in the post research review session that the symbolic modelling did not stop when their involvement in the research stopped. These six participants said they had both gained insight and created strategies for noticing their perceptions of the coachee, the sponsor and the organisation so as to change their response in real time interactions. Three of the eight said they were keeping a reflective journal, accounting for what happened in a session and processing what they noticed, what their thoughts were and how they felt. The other three said they were using metaphoric landscapes prior to starting work with new coachees to surface perceptions they were holding that might impact on the work they would engage in. All eight said that they thought they had richer material for supervision because of their involvement in the research. I was left with a strong sense of the participants being dedicated not only to the learning of the coachee but also to their own learning.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to share the emerging narrative as the research unfolded and my analysis of that data. In the next chapter, I will connect the emergent findings to the theoretical perspectives.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter looks at the results detailed in Chapter Five above in the light of the existing theory and literature. I will present each of the superordinate themes, picking up and weaving the theoretical threads through the text.

In naming the superordinate themes, I did not consciously fall in line with the psychodynamic concept of the different parts of self. The descriptions I chose are an attempt to make sense of the phenomena emerging from analysis of the data and they do not necessarily connect to the structure and function of personality. What emerged was data supporting the notion of there being more than one self within the coach and a sense there is a place in the mind to which unacceptable feelings or fantasies are banished. In this work, the three aspects of self are depicted as internal objects and analysed in the context of external relationships without consideration of how these aspects may be connected to the internal aspects of the psyche that are developed in childhood and present in all relationships.

The idealised self

Focus on the self

As mentioned in Chapter Two, fantasy is important to psychodynamic theory. We create an idealised notion of who we are in the world and this can be fantastic. In the first stage of the research process, what emerged was this idealised notion the participants held of who they are as coaches (Czander, 1993). Berne (1966) suggested that we are drawn to an organisation or group and we develop a fantasy of what it will be like to be part of it. I suggest that this may also be true of professional roles: we are drawn to a profession looking at it as an *outsider* and we create a preconscious expectation of what it will be like to operate in that role.

In the case of coaching, there may be a glamorous image of what it is like to be a coach, a fixed frame of reference of the concept of coaching and the coaching process. The data which emerged in the early part of the first stage interview suggests that the participants had a fixed frame of reference and were intent on holding on to that so as not to experience disappointment (Peltier, 2009). The potential is that if they face the confronting reality of the professional role, they will experience psychic conflict and may question their

ability to be competent in the role. One way to avoid facing any negative thoughts they have on themselves is to take on the identity of the coach. If this is the case, they present the 'face' of coaching as a defence mechanism to protect their sense of self (Berne, 1966; Mellor & Schiff, 1980). Identification is an adaptive defence mechanism.

My interpretation is that the participants were adopting defence mechanisms that both deny and distort reality though lack of awareness of how these were influencing their responses in the stage one research interviews. Denial is a simple defence and amounts to unconscious ignoring of the facts. They seemed to be ignoring the significance of the emerging data. I think they created a systemic role (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) for themselves as the person who makes things better in the organisation, thus providing a secure base (Bowlby, 1969) and allowing them to feel good about themselves. Extrapolating the idea put forward by Kets de Vries (1991) that to avoid feelings of inferiority we take on the identity of the organisation and become 'company men and women', which causes us to give up our own values and independent judgement, the participants seem to be taking on the identity of the professional coach.

Focus on relationships

The invitation to use metaphor in many ways held a mirror up to the participants to challenge their perception of self and the other parties to the relationship. Their responses suggest they were still holding a sense of self which reflected the fixed frame of reference, given the positive way they described themselves metaphorically whilst generally describing the other parties to the relationship in more negative terms. They were invited to step into their inner world to reflect on their experiences, albeit using words to explore that world. In focussing on relationships at this stage, I am making a connection with what Berne (1963) called the 'private structure', that is the mental picture of what the relationships are or should be like. The private structure generally contains myth, fantasies, past experiences, expectations and beliefs about self, others and, in this case, the coaching process.

Defining the parties to the contract using the metaphor of season drew out information which was based on their interpretation of current and past experience, as well as their beliefs about self and others. It seemed that new information was emerging for them. Reflecting on the work on Kets de Vries, as mentioned above, I found no evidence that these participants were taking on the identity of the organisation. Rather, they were projecting themselves as very different from the organisation and, I think, in some way above it.

Focus on the unconscious process

There was unwillingness in the early stage of the research among participants to consider if the narrative they had shared with me could in any way be influencing the work they do in the coaching process. This indicates they are still holding on to how they think they should be seen. They may have felt their competence was being challenged and they had not yet allowed themselves to trust this process or indeed to trust me to be neutral. I had a sense of distortion in that they were not able to cut through their own internal filters.

I connect this to Berne's (1966) theory of therapeutic operations, which helps us to understand the focal points for healthy development. Two of the five key points that are part of this theory are relevant, these being trust and accurate perceptions. The psychologically aware person can trust themselves and others, and, in the process of developing trust, becomes more open and revealing in their relationships. Beyond this, they are able to accurately assess surroundings, including the threats, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses and motivations of others. Effective people do not distort things much; rather they are clear-eyed observers. What I heard at this stage in the process was an element of discounting and grandiosity (see footnote 4 above); the participants seemed unaware of their inner world of feelings and fantasies prior to the use of metaphor. With the use of metaphor, they became aware of these but seemed unwilling to own them or to consider there might be any influence on their work.

In the context of social defences (Jacques, 1953), defence against anxiety and the concept of 'splitting', I wonder whether in times of transformational change, coaching and the coach become all that is good in the organisation and all other parties to the relationship are seen as the cause of the problems. No strong evidence for this emerged from the research but there may be something in that which is worthy of further research.

I experienced the participants as, at best, ambivalent to the concept of authority and power, suggesting a lack of comfort with this. Levinson's (1996) work on healthy development suggests the need to be comfortable with authority and power.

The authentic self

Focus on self

When asked to consider who they were as a coach using symbolic representation, the participants started to define the fantasy they held about themselves. Their choice of symbol elicited more information on their mental constructs. I noticed they had each

chosen what could be considered as a positive symbol and their narrative reflected the positive characteristics of the symbol. So, from a psychodynamic perspective, there is an increase in awareness in the individual and a capacity to articulate more information on how they think, behave and feel. My hypothesis is that they were still unconsciously defending their sense of self, the professional image, the identity they believe they must have as opposed to their authentic identity. At some level, they are still applying the defence mechanisms of distortion and denial, although I experienced more openness to their accepting that the unconscious mind may be at work in the professional role based on their reflections.

Focus on relationships

The participants' stories continued to unfold as they chose symbols to represent the other parties to the relationship. In creating their imago in the form of a metaphorical landscape, the participants explored the relationships based on the concept of people as self-organising systems. Within the wider system of the organisation, they create a coaching system and the existence of that system is dependent on the interplay between the component parts. The creation of a metaphorical landscape invited the participants to identify the dilemmas, challenges and discontents presented by the system (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2001). This landscape gave the participants a visual imago, which allowed them to look at the relationship between the parties to the contract in more depth. This visual representation ratified the concept of psychological distance (Micholt, 1992), in that participants placed themselves closer to the coachee than to any other party and the emerging stories suggested the relationship was not equal. It emerged that closeness to the coachee may have, on occasion, been at the expense of the relationship with the other parties. What I heard from the participants caused me to believe that organisation was not often at the forefront of their mind. It was not possible to identify if the relationship between the participant and the coachee became unconsciously collusive at any point.

The imago using metaphorical landscape suggested that Armstrong's (2005) theory of the organisation in the mind was relevant in that each participant created a visual representation of how they perceived the coaching system. The imago allowed me to interpret the participants' experience of how activities and relationships were organised, structured and connected in their intrapersonal process. The imago showed their internal model, which was unique to them, and created a sense of the part of their inner world which relies on experiences of their interactions, relationships and the activities they engage in. What remained intangible at this stage was the extent to which this inner world gives rise to emotions, values and responses, which may be influencing the participants in their work.

Of relevance is the concept of systems theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), which suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Organisations are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system. I connect this to family systems thinking, which suggests that there is a family role expected of each member. As described in Chapter Two, there are basic roles and underlying roles in the family system and these can be transferred into the workplace (Blevins, 1993). I am extrapolating the theory and suggest there may be a perceived coaching role emerging in the organisational context and this role is taken on to accomplish something in response to the organisational structure and the interpersonal system. So, whilst there is limited evidence from the research to suggest the participants' family roles get played out unconsciously in the coaching process, there is the potential for a 'super-hero' role to be co-created in the organisational system to manage threat and anxiety. There is a possibility that the idealised self is a response to an unconscious invitation from the organisation to take on the role of 'rescuer'. The emerging authentic self starts to contradict the preconceived and unspoken requirements of the coaching role and this had the potential to cause discomfort in the research process. This contradicts to some extent my reflections above but I share it to show how the process as it unfolds starts to influence my thinking.

Focus on the unconscious process

By the end of the second stage interviews, I had a sense that the participants were developing a new understanding of how they made meanings of themselves, the relationship and the deeper below-the-surface reasons for human behaviour. My sense at this stage was that the participants had started to:

- Acknowledge the existence of a multi-layered collage of images in the human unconscious
- Develop an understanding that these unconscious images are linked to the way they work; although at this stage, they did not seem to be sure how these images were affecting their work.

Freud (1951) suggested that we do not know much of our own mental activity and Cramer (2000) confirmed the existence of the unconscious psychological process. The data which emerged at the second stage of the interviews correlates with the notion of the unconscious mind and the unconscious psychological process. I connect what emerged at this stage in the research with the concept of the psychological level of the contract (Berne, 1966). Berne suggests that there is always a psychological level to a contract and

he described it as the unconscious and, therefore, unspoken aspects of the relationship which influence the way the parties engage and communicate with each other. The psychological level of the contract started to emerge in the second stage interviews through the deeper exploration of how the participants were experiencing all the parties to the contract, themselves included. If they hold unconscious and unspoken beliefs, then it would logically follow that this will impact on the work because they are not accessing information that may be a hindrance.

I am mindful that there are two perceivers of the metaphoric landscape, the participant who detected the symbolically significant patterns across their experience and me as the researcher who noticed the patterns of their verbal and non-verbal expressions and then made the interpretation connecting their emerging story to existing theory. I am confident in saying that there is an unconscious process at work and that it may have an influence on the coaching process. I had no conclusive evidence at this stage as to what that might be.

The unconscious self

Focus on self

At this third stage in the process, using indirect observation, the participants identified when they had noticed something change in the coaching process and, therefore, in the work. They connected with the characteristics of the symbols they had chosen and identified thoughts, feelings and behaviours that had hitherto been inaccessible. Alongside this, I can report a shift in perception; they seem to let go of the 'idealised' self and accept the human side of the self.

Interestingly, although they seem to have let go of the idealised self to some extent, there are flashes of that sense of self from time to time, suggesting unconscious processes were still at work. What emerged, however, was an acceptance and understanding of how the unconscious mind was influencing them moment by moment in the coaching process. As reported above, despite the emerging awareness, they are to some extent focussing on what they are doing rather than their way of being, which suggests that they are thinking about their performance as a coach rather than exploring the unconscious process and what prompted it to emerge in the way it did. The fact they chose to avoid the expression of authentic feelings suggests that they are still not fully in touch with, or accepting of, their unconscious self. They seem restricted by their inner world, which is dynamic and changing and, thus, creating inner turbulence. There seemed to be pressure from both internal and external sources creating the turbulence. As the new information

emerged, so did an emergent discomfort to the changing relationship they had with themselves. The external source, the research process, was the event that, in many ways, created the turbulence.

The data suggests they were getting a strong sense of their inner world and noticing through reflecting on their video, recording how powerful this influence of this can be on how they think, feel and behave. Wilson (2010) explains the concept of gradations of consciousness, so that some parts of our unconscious mind are more readily accessible than others. She uses the metaphor of an iceberg to reflect on how we see and experience ourselves and others. What is on the surface is readily visible and generally acceptable but is only one-third of who we really are. Two-thirds of the iceberg is below the surface, feeding and informing thoughts, feelings and corresponding patterns of behaviour. At this stage, the participants were submerged and considering aspects of themselves that had hitherto been beneath the surface.

Focus on relationships

The organisation in the mind emerged strongly in the third stage interviews. The fact that the participants stayed with the same symbol to represent the organisation seemed significant (although some of them rearranged the placement at different times in the session). The participants seemed to hold a fixed belief about the organisation, which did not change throughout the two sessions when they worked with symbols. By moving the symbols in response to something they noticed in the recording, they were having an emotional response to the organisation which impacted their experience and, therefore, their work in the moment. The organisation in the mind refers not only to the conscious and unconscious mental constructs and the assumptions the individual makes, it also refers to the emotional resonances which register and are present in the mind of the participant (Hirschhorn, 1988). When the participants are asked to reflect on their experience of the organisation, they are looking into the inner world of the organisation and to the world within a world, that is, their inner world. There seemed to be both a connection and a disconnection between the inner world of the organisation and the inner world of the participant and this was reflected in their responses on how they were experiencing the organisation. What emerged at this stage connected strongly for me with Bowen's (1974) concept of triangles referred to in Chapter Two. I noticed at this stage the tension shifted around the relationships, sometimes being between the coach and coachee, the coach and sponsor and the coach and the organisation.

What emerged in the context of transference and countertransference and its presence on all relationships has relevance (Whittle & Ozod, 2009). The choice and placement of the

symbol in the developing metaphorical landscape and the descriptions given by the participants relating to the characteristics of the symbols gave me information on the potential transference and counter-transference in the relationships. I believe that the participants started their involvement in the research process in transferential relationships with the other parties to the contract. The relationships seemed to be shaped by preconceptions that were transferred onto the actual relationships and which had the potential to confine, limit and distort the reality of the relationships. They reflected the persona of the sponsor through the characteristics of the symbol and they chose to stay with the same symbol throughout sessions two and three. This suggests that although they move the symbol around the landscape to create a different imago, they do not change their perception of the sponsor. This further suggests that their choice of symbol may not wholly represent their experience of the sponsor but may also include other experiences outside of this relationship. The lack of interaction with the sponsor may not allow the participants to experience and, therefore, collect data which challenges the preconceptions they hold. Thus, the chance to explore a confronting reality is limited.

Staying with this theoretical concept, I considered something similar to be at work in their relationship with the coachee. Most of the participants kept the same symbol to represent the coachee throughout the process, with only two changing the symbol. Working with Obholzer's (2006) suggestion that it is never irrelevant to question the presence of transference and counter-transference in a relationship, I believe that although the transferential relationship may not be present at all times in the coaching process, it is most likely to be there some of the time. Given the individual potential for co-creating transferential relationships and the transferences generated by the organisational structure, which has levels of authority and status differentials, as well as complex systems of roles and relationships, it is difficult to conceive that the coaching relationship can be completely free from transference. People bring their psyche and personal history to every relationship; therefore, the participants will behave towards the parties to the contract in the same way that they behave towards other significant people. The reflection on their own process in the relationship with the coachee gives a strong indication of moments of transference. At this stage, there is a deepening awareness of what was happening under the surface of the relationships. The strongest data comes from the relationship between the participant and the coachee, where the participant notices their actions and reactions to what is happening in the relational process. They start to notice the cause and effect of the interactions they are having with the coachee, the moving towards or moving away from each other. In essence, they are surfacing new information on the dynamics of the relationship.

Focus on the unconscious process

My sense is that involvement in the research process challenged the participants' beliefs about themselves, the parties to the relationship and the coaching process. In the early stages, they were living a core set of beliefs they had created about themselves as coaches and about the coaching process. Through engaging in reflection and creating the story, these beliefs were put under the microscope and challenged more by themselves than by me. The theory that resonates when I consider my experience of how the participants transformed their understanding of themselves, the parties to relationship and the process is that of social defence mechanisms (Jacques, 1953). At the start of the process, the participants were using defence mechanisms to distort or deny reality so that they were not exposed to fear or anxiety. Their unconscious was working in the research process in much the same way as it was in the coaching process. So, at the start, we had a parallel process⁷ running. In the first part of the research process, I experienced the participants as protecting themselves, their professional identity and their competence. Fear or anxiety was most probably present for them because they had engaged in a process which would put their professional practice under the microscope. This resulted in the use of defence mechanisms to keep threatening feelings and painful thoughts outside of their awareness. This suggests they were distorting reality to protect their sense of self.

As the interview progressed and they stepped into the inner world, they employed defence mechanisms less overtly. Their attachment to the symbols they chose suggests, however, they were employing defence mechanisms. The discomfort they experience moment by moment in the coaching process raises anxiety which moves them away from the experience and the ability to sit with the anxiety and to be curious. Thus, the unconscious mind is motivating their behaviour as a defence against anxiety, which, in turn, moves them away from dealing with what they experience in the moment. My role as a researcher was to elicit their mental constructs and interpret their experiences in the light of the emerging data. With this in mind, I am compelled to say that I did notice an emerging awareness of the unconscious mind and how this was impacting on the relationships and the process. Most awareness came from the stage three interviews, when the participants reflected on a live recording of a coaching session. They became aware of something new when they could 'observe' themselves at work. The data points to evidence that the unconscious is at work in all aspects of relationships to a lesser or greater degree. Nin (1903-1977) said: '*We do not see things as they are; we see things as*

⁷ Parallel process: What is happening in one set of relationships is being played out in another set of relationships (Stewart & Joines 2000).

we are' (cited in Blenkiron, 2005, p. 49), and this seeing of what we expect to be there can make the discovery of something new virtually impossible.

My reaction to the material

Reflecting on the creation of this thesis, I find that my relationship to the theoretical perspectives changed as the interviews progressed, the analysis took shape and the writing was engaged with. Much in line with McAdam's (1993) work on how we not only create but also in a sense become our narratives, the separate narratives of the participants along with the combined narrative of this thesis has changed how I look at my own unconscious process as a coach. I sensed at an early stage in the research the proximity of the material and how the impact it had on me could be an issue. In a similar way as a coachee in the coaching process with whom the coach sees themselves as having much shared material, there is a greater need to exercise caution. The fact that in the case of the research, the participants have the same professional role as I do or their experiences resonate with me does not mean that their experience is the same as mine. Therefore, the analysis of the results and the writing of the thesis has been an exercise in balance between avoiding too many assumptions, yet allowing my familiarity with the area to be of use.

I was aware that what I brought to the research process in the shape of my values, prejudices, identity and object relations was crucial to understanding the potential for transference and countertransference. Without this awareness, it would be impossible for me to know whether the feeling that the participant had evoked in me belonged to the participant, was co-created, or, more properly, belonged to me. As the research process unfolded, I became aware very early on that I was being grandiose about my capacity for self-awareness in the here and now and, to some extent, about my awareness of my personal history (my there and then). This was a parallel process, in that I was doing what the participants were doing in assuming I was clean in my process. The process of reflection and the use of supervision further developed my capacity to be suspicious of my own presuppositions.

The participants' engagement in self-deception raised my curiosity about my capacity for self-deception and the use of defence mechanisms. In supervision, I was mindful to seek help to attend to transference and countertransference in the research relationship to ensure I was not mistaking my experiences for those of the participants.

As I started to analyse the data, I felt concerned about the potential reaction to what was emerging both from the participants and the organisations that had partnered me in the

research project. I was concerned that my analysis would be painful and distressing for the other parties to the relationship. I wasn't sure that it would be properly processed and integrated. I engaged in discounting and grandiosity, on the one hand, discounting the ability of the parties to process and integrate the information without feeling judged. On the other hand, there was a significant element of grandiosity in thinking that the power of my analysis and writing could cause pain and distress for others. I wanted to be able to tell the truth and was helped by reading the experience of Holloway and Jefferson (2001), who suggest that painful learning is not necessarily harmful learning. I concluded that my truthful analysis might result in disequilibrium but it did not automatically follow that it would be harmful.

I realised, through my own reflections, reading and the supervision process, that I was concerned to ensure I could rely on myself to be independent and to reflect the reality that emerged in the research. The analysis of the data caused me to pause and consider how best to interpret the data and discuss the results whilst holding on to the values of honesty, empathy and respect.

What became increasingly important as the research process unfolded was my ability to stay neutral whilst at the same time showing empathy and emotion in response to the participants' emerging understanding of self. Coffey (1999, p.57) states:

'To a large extent, the quality of the research experience (for all involved) and the quality of the research data is dependent upon the formation of relationships and the development of an emotional connection to the field.'

Turning my attention to what has changed in my practice because of this work, my first reflection is that I did not set learning goals from the perspective of self as coach but rather from the perspective of self as researcher. Much of my work as a consultant is based on critical ethnography and, in this context, the quality of my data collection and analysis in organisational projects has developed significantly.

In the context of my work as a coach, the main thing that has changed in my practice is my coaching framework and how I describe my offer to clients. I have put working as a psychodynamic coach front and centre in my framework. I am more confident talking about the power of the unconscious mind and how it influences our relationships. I pay more attention to self-deception and notice that it is not confined to the people I work with but that I too can deceive myself. I pay more attention to the somatic responses I have in the coaching process as a clue to co-creating a transferential relationship and I am better able to step aside from that.

As a provider of coach training, I redesigned my Business Coaching programme as a result of this research, to include more psychological theory and personal experience in the programme. I had previously believed the professional coaching bodies would not accredit a programme that did not have a pure focus on the achievement of specified competences. The redesigned programme has been awarded Accredited Coach Training Programme status with the International Coach Federation and Advanced Diploma status with the Association for Coaching. I have been more confident in offering master class sessions for coaches on psychodynamic concepts, designing and delivering a programme of workshops covering topics such as transference and counter-transference in the coaching relationship, systemic coaching, contracting and the unconscious mind, and power in the coaching relationship. I have also designed and run workshops on working with symbolic representation and metaphorical landscape. The design and redesign of programmes has stretched my own thinking and learning, as well as, I believe, adding value to the wider professional community.

I am still reflecting on what learning I received from the research that impacts my work as a coaching strategist. I am considering this as a work in progress.

Although it is hard to quantify exactly what I mean by this, I sense that my practice as a coach, coach supervisor and coach trainer has been refreshed by engaging with this research.

Summary

In this chapter, I have sought to connect the findings to psychodynamic theory and to capture my own learning from the project. In the next chapter, I draw conclusions from the research and consider the potential impact on coach education and development.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

In this final chapter, I start by summarising my conclusions and go on to reflect on what I consider to be the implications for the coaching community. I also mention what I consider to be the limitations of the research and make recommendations for future research.

Summary

The aim of this project was to ascertain whether coaches are influenced at an unconscious level in their work by their experience of the component parts of the coaching system and to answer the research question: *'How does the coach's unconscious mind influence the coaching process?'* The combination of interpretative phenomenological analysis and psychosocial methodology allowed the relevant data to be collected, analysed and interpreted and enables me to say with confidence that the coach's professional practice is influenced at an unconscious level and, thus, the coach's unconscious mind influences the coaching process. The research outcomes do not allow me to conclude whether the influence of the unconscious mind clouds or illuminates the work of the coach, although the data points to the work being clouded at times in the coaching process. This brings me back to Jung (1991), his view of the psyche being that the mind and the unconscious can largely be trusted and at all times it is attempting to self-regulate to assist the individual. The unconscious works with positive intent, which I agree with, but it may be limiting in terms of the interpersonal process and, potentially, the outcome of the work.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the objectives of the project were multi-faceted, the primary objective being to heighten awareness of and the sensitivity to unconscious processes and how these influence the coaching process. What I say with certainty is that the unconscious impacts on the coach/coachee relationship moment by moment in the coaching process and the participants reported having a heightened awareness as a result of engaging in the research. I can also say with confidence that the data shows that when something shifts in one relationship, all other relationships are affected.

The secondary objective was to ascertain the extent to which organisational, relational and psychodynamic influences coalesce to affect individual change. I believe that the use of symbolic representation and metaphorical landscape created a picture which vividly represented these different influences as they were experienced by the participants.

Whether these influences coalesce to affect individual change cannot be proven from the data. Looking at this from a social constructivist perspective, it naturally follows that human interaction between parties to the relationship creates knowledge, development and, therefore, change. The psychodynamic process influences the behaviour of the parties to the relationships; therefore, it must impact and affect individual change.

The final objective was to reflect on the research findings and consider in which ways these might inform the ongoing development of core competences for coaches and the professional development of this community of practice. I address this in the section below.

Implications for the learning partners

I have already shared the outcomes of the research with my learning partners and found them receptive to what I was saying. Two issues arose for them, one being the continuing professional development of their internal coaches and the other being the systemic issues which may be influencing the coaching process. With regard to the development of their internal coaches, the partners are currently considering advanced training, which focuses on increasing psychological awareness. They are also reflecting on the supervision process for coaches and looking at making it a requirement that coaches present a coaching recording for analysis and discussion with their supervisors at least annually.

I found that the research outcomes had stirred a curiosity in the learning partners about potential systemic issues that may be influencing the coaching process. They were particularly interested in further investigating the systemic role which may be created unconsciously in the organisation because of how coaching is perceived. They have started to consider the extent to which coaches may be perceived as the 'hero', the person who makes everything better in the system. They are considering how they might conduct a piece of internal research which investigates this issue, through the collection of data from coaches, coachees and line managers.

Implications for the professional coaching community

I think there are manifold implications for the professional coaching community. I am interested particularly in coach education and professional accreditation and I think this is an area that, as professionals, we should all be concerned with irrespective of our role in the community of practice. At some level, all of us are involved in coach education, whether as teachers, mentors, supervisors, professional bodies or authors. I offer my

conclusions as a challenge to all involved in the community, that is coaches (students and accredited coaches), supervisors, coach educators, coaching authors and professional coaching bodies.

The greatest impact of this research on the coaching community is what the data gives us in the context of education and professional accreditation. Peltier (2009, p.xxxi) defines executive coaching in the following way:

‘Psychological skills and methods are employed in a one-to-one relationship to help someone become a more effective leader or manager.’

His definition is relevant in the context of the findings of this research and developing the psychological skills of coaches is crucial to the success of coaching. I would add that the use of psychological skills requires a high level of self-awareness and self-regulation and I will address this throughout this chapter.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) identifies 11 core competences for coaches (www.coachfederation.org), all of which are relevant in some measure to self-awareness and self-regulation. Of particular relevance to the data emerging in this study are:

- *Establishing the coaching agreement (contract)*
- *Coaching presence*
- *Creating awareness*
- *Direct communication*

The concept of the psychological level of the contract (Berne 1966) came alive in the research when the participants started to surface their unconscious and, therefore, unspoken beliefs about themselves and the other parties to the contract. Micholt's (1992) theory of psychological distance in multi-faceted relationships is also of relevance given the study showed that all the participants were psychologically closer to the coachee than to the other parties at points in the process. It could be argued that this is a natural phenomenon and, given the relational nature of the process, to be expected. The extent to which this is felt by other parties to the contract is the litmus test; the research did not allow for exploration of this. Professional coaching bodies place a strong emphasis on the importance of the coaching agreement (contract) and, thus, it is obvious to me that understanding the work of Berne and Micholt is relevant for clean contracting.

Coaching presence and the capacity to be with the coachee in the here and now is crucial to the success of coaching. Where there is interference from the coach's unconscious

mind, it is logical to assume this reduces the capacity to be present and to experience the process in the here and now. The participants' reflections on what they noticed in their recording, identifying their unconscious thoughts and feelings, suggest a greater awareness of their own intrapsychic process and how that impacts on the interpersonal process. This will surely have an impact on their ability to be fully present. Presence is more than being fully aware and conscious in the moment; it is being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense. If the coach is to be truly present, they must be aware of these and able to let go. The data reflects how the coach is touched by the coaching experience and yet there was evidence that they shy away from sharing with the coachee what that might be telling them. This is due to what is happening being partly conscious but being largely unconscious.

The concept of true presence is connected to the competence of creating awareness. What emerged from this study is that coaches are required to suspend their beliefs, that is, to see freshly by stopping their habitual ways of thinking and perceiving. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) suggest that there are risks involved in suspending beliefs and to do so, individuals in the organisational helping professions are required to do personal work. They suggest this personal work is developing the capacity to be more aware of thoughts and feelings and how these impact interactions. To support the creation awareness in others, coaches are required to be self-aware to ensure that, as far as is humanly possible, their unconscious process does not interfere with the work of coachees.

For coaches to use direct communication effectively, they must notice and name their own thoughts and feelings, notice their reaction to the other person and mindfully respond whilst taking responsibility for themselves. Direct communication also requires the coach to step away from discounting and grandiosity (see footnote 4 above), to step into the unknown, sit with their own curiosity and believe that the coachee has the capacity to hear the direct communication. The stage three interviews revealed that the coaches, in some instances, were not aware of their thoughts and feelings and, in other instances, were aware but did not reveal this in the service of the coachee.

With these competences in mind, I believe it is time to review the assessment methodology used by the professional coaching bodies. Currently, the ICF uses a multiple incident, single format assessment process, and progression through the accreditation hierarchy is based on tutor contact hours, applied coaching hours and the achievement of a higher level of criteria in each of the competences. Coaches require undertaking a re-credentialing process every three years and this is achieved through engagement in continuing coach education, although there is no specific requirement as to what that

should be. I should also say that both student and accredited coaches are required to be in regular and ongoing supervision (based on reflective practice). I think the gap in the assessment process is the use of single format assessment and I believe that it is essential to use multiple format, multiple incident assessment as a sounder predictor of competence. For example, this research shows that the level of accreditation achieved by the coach is not a reliable predictor of the understanding they have of their own process, nor of their level of self-awareness. In each of the three research encounters involved in the data collection, all eight coaches had insights into their unconscious process through reflective practice. Thus, I would argue that at the very least, the assessment process should contain a narrative on the coach's reflections on the recordings they submit for assessment. At best, I would suggest an oral exam which not only shows the coach achieving competence in work with the client but allows the coach to engage in reflexivity with examiners on what they perceived to be happening in the coaching encounter.

I suggest that this research could be used to review the design and delivery of coach education programmes. I think this may also be true for design and delivery of education programmes for supervisors on the basis that if coach education is enhanced, then it follows that supervisor education should be too. Hawkins and Shohett (2000) introduce the concept of the developmental approach to supervision stating that the coach needs something different from the supervisor at different stages in their development. It follows that supervisor education must address how the supervisor will work with the coach to ensure the specific development needs are met. Many of the programmes I have reviewed in writing this thesis focus entirely on the development of basic skills and the achievement of base-line credentials. I accept that coach education has to start somewhere and there is a need for this type of training so that student practitioners can begin their development journey. I also think, however, that irrespective of the type of programme and level of accreditation that results for the student, there is a need to teach reflective practice and include this in the student assessment process. The study shows participants becoming much more reflective in their practice as the research unfolded. As a community, we should not assume that people will automatically reflect on their work and my encouragement to coach educators is to consider how they might include engagement in reflective practice in their programmes if they do not already do so.

An implication I draw from this research is that continuing professional development for coaches must place less emphasis on developing new skills and more on increasing psychological awareness, both in general and in the moment of the coaching conversation. Coaching and phenomenological inquiry are both reflective practices, aimed at enhancing understanding, making meaning, creating awareness and generating insights. De Haan (2016) suggests that the coach should work on their own inquiry

question in reflective conversation with others to prepare for working with the inquiry question of coachees. It is impossible not to be touched by the coaching relationship. The research validates this assertion and it is a natural next step to train coaches to deal with their experience as it happens, what we call in coaching 'dancing in the moment'.

The single biggest frustration for me in reviewing the coaching literature was the implicit assumption that coaches are fully aware of their own unconscious process. I think this research proves this not to be the case. My challenge to authors on coaching is to identify their own assumptions and the extent to which they believe coaches can use psychological models without training and assessment of practice. My experience is that coaches will pick up books to develop their knowledge and range of interventions, but there is no guarantee that they will use the contents of the book to develop their awareness of their own unconscious process. I remain unconvinced that any of us can surface our unconscious without external support. I believe that as professionals we all need feedback from peers, supervisors and clients in addition to self-reflection. If we offer texts on the use of psychology in coaching, we have a moral obligation to tell the reader to use the models to increase their self-understanding and self-awareness before they use them with clients.

I believe that this research shows the coaches' attachment to their identity and I think there is a possibility that protection of the idealised self is to do with protection of their reputation. In other words, *who they think they are is confused with who others think they should be*. Thus, they take on the identity of *who others think they should be as a coach; reputation and identity become intertwined*. As the research unfolded, the coaches faced confronting reality, became more self-aware and were able to contact the deeper aspects of the self to better understand who they are. I suggest that as professionals we have an obligation to our clients to increase our self-awareness, to understand and acknowledge the meaning of what we do and the reasons behind our thoughts, feelings and actions. Freud (1951) stated that increasing self-awareness means discovering the unconscious origins of our everyday behaviour. My experience is that this journey of self-discovery does not come about solely through self-reflection or introspection, yet it has become a perceived truth that we achieve self-awareness in this way.

Based on the way in which the research unfolded, my intention is to challenge coaches to challenge their own thinking on this. I think there is some work that coaches can do through self-reflection and considered thinking on what they take to the supervision process. I think that supervisors can support the development of the coaches they work with through understanding and working with psychodynamic models. I would encourage

supervisors to consider how the use of metaphor and symbolism might invite deeper reflection in the supervision encounter.

I further challenge coaches who use psychological models not only to ensure that they are using these correctly and in a safe way, but to use them to understand themselves better. I believe we have a moral and professional duty to test theories and models on ourselves as practitioners before we use them with clients.

One of the things that struck me about the research was the significance of subjectivity and the different ways we emphasise relationships. In this I mean the relationship with the self, others and what we co-create together in the coaching encounter. The research shows that being challenged to reflect on these relationships increased self-awareness and shifted mental constructs. I believe it further shows that profound change in understanding happens through experience.

At the heart of this thesis is the concept of the reflexive practitioner and I believe achieving real reflexivity is crucial whatever role we have in the coaching community. This is the reason I think there is learning for all of us in this research.

I believe the research shows that central to the work we do in coaching is the relationship. It is crucial that as coaches we pay attention to patterns in play between the parties to the relationship and that we are equipped to pay attention to these as they emerge.

Understanding our own unconscious process helps us as coaches to find new and more authentic ways of relating. The research shows the importance of curiosity, critical reflection and creativity. I think there is an opportunity for all of us in the profession to allow ourselves the freedom to learn, to be curious and to explore the experience in the moment. I believe that the research shows the significance of the unconscious. The unconscious is not a place nor a thing but rather a self-perpetuating pattern of organising self in relationships that remains largely out of awareness.

Finally, the research shows that coaching is not a one-person intervention; rather, it is a multi-party psychology. All the parties to relationship are in the coaching room in both the conscious and unconscious mind of the coach. If this is the case for the coach, it is likely to be the case for the coachee.

Limitations of the research

I find it impossible to comment on whether a different methodology would have resulted in different findings. Having reached the end of the research process, I believe that combining IPA and the psychosocial methodology allowed me to answer the research

question. Undoubtedly, there are limitations to the study and I see these as primarily to do with the limitations of the participant sample. Although all the participants were familiar with theory and some of them were using psychodynamic models in their work (primarily models from Transactional Analysis), none of them was formally trained and accredited as a psychodynamic practitioner. Additionally, it may be relevant to the research outcomes that the study is both gender specific and sector specific. I think the research could also have been limited by the short three-stage process, and perhaps a more in depth study with fewer participants would have yielded different results.

Whilst I do not consider the following to be limitations, there are a few things I would do differently if I were doing this research again, some of which are practical and of less importance and others which are more important and connected with the research design. Focussing on the research design, I wish I had included interpretation of the research encounter in the project proposal. The reason for this is that in reflecting on what I noticed about myself when I listened to the recordings, I was able to surface aspects of my own unconscious mind. I think there would have been value added to the research by looking at how the research process paralleled the coaching process, further highlighting the omnipresence of the unconscious mind. On reflection, I think I missed something by not adding another stage to the interview process. As I write this thesis, I realise that a further stage which replicated stage three could have been used to ascertain if the coach's unconscious was at a play less frequently because of the insights they gained at stage three. Exploration at this stage may have identified changes in their practice and highlighted their capacity to be fully present. This might have added gravitas to my assertion that coach education needs to focus on the development of psychological skills, the capacity to surface their own unconscious process and being more self-aware.

My actions

As part of the process of my studies, I have designed and delivered master class workshops on the theory and practice implications of the organisation in the mind, spoken at a coaching conference on the subject and written a chapter entitled 'The Journey to Autonomy' for a collaborative book on Transactional Analysis. I have developed an outline and project proposal for a new book on Transactional Analysis and Coaching. I have also written a chapter on Transactional Analysis Coaching for a coaching textbook.

I intend to share the outcomes of the research at two coaching conferences next year. I am in the process of developing a continuing professional development programme for both coaches and coach supervisors on the theory and practice of working

psychodynamically. I have written a text for the ICF research database and for the *International Transactional Analysis Research Journal*.

Future research

I believe this study will increase awareness within the coaching community of the power of the unconscious mind and I hope it energises others to develop further research in the field. My suggestions include:

- A longitudinal study focussing on how becoming aware of unconscious processes can influence the coach/coachee relationship over time
- A comparable study of coachees to explore their unconscious process and to consider how this affected the work.
- A re-run of this research with male internal and external coaches
- A re-run of this research in the private sector.

Regarding my comments above on the participant sample:

- A comparable study of coaches who are psychodynamically trained and actively working with psychodynamic models.

And finally,

- A research project which studies the emerging role of the coach in the organisational system.

I conclude with this quote from De Haan (2016, p.3):

‘Coaching is a messy business; two people bring fears, doubts, uncertainties and anxieties into the room and try to make sense of it all. In short, coaching is about being human.’

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Websites:

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy: <https://bacp.org.uk>

The International Coach Federation: <https://www.coachfederation.org>

Appendix 1 - Overview for learning partners and participants

Doctorate in Professional Studies (Coaching)

The Institute of Work Based Learning – University of Middlesex

Overview for Learning Partners and Participants

Researcher: Alexandra Stewart

Supervisor: Dr Peter Critten – University of Middlesex

Consultant: Professor David Clutterbuck – Clutterbuck Associates

Project title: Psychological Contracts in Coaching

A comparative study of the psychological contracts which exist in the minds of external and internal coaches in the public sector in Scotland with a focus on the National Health Service

Aim of the project

As coaching has grown as a profession in the last ten years, writing on the subject has grown exponentially. In the more recent past, we have seen the development of core competences for coaches and the accreditation of coach training programmes by professional bodies. Much work has been done on the development of coaching as a profession, but it would appear that little attention has been paid to the part that relationships play at an unconscious level in defining the relationship between the coach, the coachee, the sponsor and the organisation nor the impact this has on the coaching contract and ultimately the achievement of coaching outcomes.

The aim of this project is to ascertain whether coaches are influenced in their professional practice at the unconscious level. The research takes a deep look at how the organisation and the constituent parties of the coaching relationship are experienced through the lens of the coach, both the internal and external one, and how this may shape or influence the coaching process.

This is a specific piece of research intended to raise awareness in the professional community of the impact of the unconscious on the coaching process.

Objectives of the project

The primary objective is to heighten awareness of, and sensitivity to, unconscious processes and how these influence the coaching process. In pursuit of the primary objective, a second objective is met, that is, to ascertain how the coach's work may be influenced by the coalescence of organisational, relational and psychodynamic influences. The final objective is to reflect on the research findings and to consider the ways in which these might inform the ongoing professional development of this community of practice.

Research Methodology

The philosophical approach underpinning the research question is the social constructivist worldview. In working with this frame of reference I hold the view that individuals seek

understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences and these meanings are varied and multiple, leading me as the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning to a few categories or ideas. The goal of research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The questions are broad and general so that participants can construct the meaning of a situation under review.

The research question lends itself to qualitative research based on critical ethnography. This approach will enable me to discover systems of meaning within the group being researched and report the findings in the form of a story or stories. In so doing, I will enter the world of the research subjects in an attempt to understand and not simply observe how they interpret their world and rationalise decisions in the context of the coaching process. Qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. I will be conducting this research through a particular theoretical lens under the umbrella heading of the psychodynamic approach.

I see qualitative research as a form of interpretive enquiry in which I will be making interpretations of what I hear and understand.

Data collection

My intention is to collect information through semi-structured interviews in the first instance and to move to indirect observation of the coach in action.

The first means of contact with the participants will be by the organisation. This document is intended to help prospective participants make a decision about their participation.

Starting with the semi-structured interviews, I begin with a set of broad questions, following these with laddering questions to capture meanings as the conversations unfold. I intend to use open questions to avoid imposing my meaning on the subject.

The emerging questions posed intend to invite self-reflection and depth of exploration on the part of the participants. The nature and construct of the questions will be influenced by the theoretical perspective that is guiding the research. All interviews will be held on a face-to-face basis.

With regard to indirect observation, I intend to ask the participants to record a coaching session with one of their clients. This will require the permission of the client and the

signing of a video release form. The purpose of asking the participants to engage in this indirect observation is to take the exploration of what is happening in the unconscious mind to a deeper level. This moves the enquiry from self-reporting and self-understanding to an exploration of what is being co-created in the relationship and the coach's role in the process. This method would involve the participant and I watching the recording and me inviting the participant to explore what was going on in their inner world as the conversation developed.

I have developed and will use an interview protocol for asking questions and recording data. This protocol comprises the following components:

- A heading, including the date, time and place of interview, the interviewer and the interviewee
- Establishing the contract for the interview, including my role as a researcher and issues of protection, permission, psychological safety and confidentiality. Space for the participant to ask questions
- A standard set of procedures for me to follow to ensure consistency from one interview to another
- The core questions
- Key themes to probe in order to access the inner world of the participants
- Space between questions to record the responses
- An end statement, including thanking the participants for their involvement, engagement and time spent on the process.

It is my intention to record the interviews and keep brief notes as a back-up. The data will be destroyed after my thesis is submitted and approved.

Ethical Considerations

Exposing hidden social processes puts both the researcher and the research participants at risk, contributing to potentially complex ethical dilemmas. I propose to mitigate the impact of this by first of all by creating discourses using ethnographic data from different participants as a means of protecting identities while preserving the authenticity and

plausibility of the reported findings. Secondly, a framework has been created for selecting which data to present by considering the sense making process. The intention behind this is to enable a balance to be struck between protecting the participants' wellbeing and my obligations to report findings honestly.

Participants will be protected during dissemination through not being identified by name or biographical details. With regard to the participants in the research, I believe there are a number of potential ethical issues outside of those mentioned in a general sense above. In the first instance, there is an issue of mutual consent. By this I mean the extent to which internal coaches, in particular, feel free to agree or not to their involvement. External coaches may seem to have more freedom of choice, but there is the consideration of the extent to which they may over-adapt in an attempt to please the client organisation.

Staying with the potential ethical issues, for those who participate in the research, there is the possibility of unspoken fear of being found wanting. The research involves an exploration of the participants' inner world and this may create anxiety in the participants and leave them feeling vulnerable. I want to demonstrate that I am coming from a place of curiosity and not one of judgement.

And finally, although I am sure that further ethical considerations will emerge as the project unfolds, there is the issue of how the participants and I relate to one another. As a qualified supervisor, I will need to pay attention to holding the research process and not moving into the supervision of the participant's professional practice.

I believe that my enabling ethical framework, my capacity for self-reflection and my intention to engage in professional supervision will support me to work ethically on this project.

Timeframe

Following submission of the research proposal to the Project Approval Panel and approval to engage in the research, the following is my proposed timetable.

Research Stage	Estimated Start Date	Estimated Completion Date
1 Clarification of ideas and questions for interviews. First draft of instrument	July 2011	September 2011
2 Preparation for interviews, including contact with participants, setting up venues, recording arrangements, etc.	August 2011	October 2011
3 Preparation of final draft of instrument	End November 2011	End December 2011
4 Piloting	January 2012	End February 2012
5 Data collection	March 2012	End September 2012

Appendix 2 - Contract with learning partners

This contract was agreed with NHS board who agree to participate

Dear

DProf Research Project – Psychological Contracts in Coaching – The Influence of the Coach’s Unconscious Mind on the Coaching Process

Further to our recent discussion, I am pleased to confirm the contract we co-created for your engagement in the above-mentioned research project. In keeping with our established way of contracting using the procedural and professional levels, I confirm that we agreed the following:

Procedural Level

- You have agreed to contact coaches on your internal and external coach bank, inviting them to participate in the research project.
- No pressure will be applied to coaches to participate in the research project by any partners to this contract.
- Coaches will self-select for participation and can withdraw from the research at any point should they choose to do so.
- Coaches will contact me directly if they are willing to participate.
- An Overview for Learning Partners and Participants (dated April 2011) detailing the aims and objectives of the project, together with details of the structure of the research interviews, data capture, data management and ethical stance has been supplied to you electronically and you send to prospective participants with the invitation letter.
- I will produce and submit to you a project plan showing the stages and time schedule for the research interviews.
- You will provide a meeting room at your headquarters for all of the research interviews.

- I will be responsible for scheduling the interviews directly with the participants and details of meeting room requirements will be notified at least four weeks in advance to the nominated person in your organisation. Changes to the agreed schedule will only be made in extenuating circumstances.
- I will provide all the necessary recording equipment.
- A copy of the final thesis will be available to the parties to this contract and it may be retained in their learning libraries.

Professional Level

- My role in this project is that of researcher, and I will conduct the interviews within the context of research, being mindful of not stepping into the role of coach or supervisor. I take full responsibility for conducting the research, as detailed in my project approval document (DPS 4521, dated July 2011), which I submitted to you in advance of our contracting meeting. I will give you a biannual review of the progression of the project.
- Your role as a learning partner in this project is to support the research process through implementation of the agreed procedural levels specified above. You have no professional responsibility associated with the conducting of either the research or the outcomes.
- I will be in supervision throughout the process to ensure that I am staying in the role of researcher and that my process is clean.
- Everything that is said in the interviews will remain strictly confidential and I will not report back to the organisation on anything that emerges in the context of the research project. There are two caveats to confidentiality: the first is that if I have reason to believe that the participant is doing anything illegal then I will inform the appropriate authorities without advising the participant that I will be taking this action. The second caveat is that if I have reason to believe that the participant is doing something that is harmful to themselves or any of the parties to the coaching contract, the interview will be stopped and I will raise the issue as a concerned professional with the individual involved. If I have cause to believe that they intend to continue with their action, I reserve the right to raise this with the appropriate person in the organisation. Other ethical considerations are detailed in the Overview for Learning Partners and Participants referred to above.

- I will bear all of the personal and professional costs of this research and not seek any financial reward from the learning partners.
- Internal coaches will not be financially penalised for the time they spend in the research process. External coaches are not being paid for their participation in the research process.
- I reserve the right to share my findings with the professional community through seminars, masterclass sessions and publications. I will, if required, remove any information which identifies the organisation.

Psychological Level

In keeping with our established way of contracting, we work on the understanding that there is a mutual respect between the parties to this contract. We acknowledge the validity of the personal and professional experience that each party brings to the relationship.

We each of us understand that there may be underlying dynamics that are outside of conscious awareness and that these may impact on the way individual participants and the learning partner group works together on this project. We accept that everything we do, we do with positive intent and trust that any difficulties arising can be dealt with effectively through direct communication and respectful challenge.

Signed _____
Researcher

Date_____

Signed_____
Head of Organisation Development

Date_____

Signed_____
Head of Organisation Development

Date_____

Appendix 3 - Excerpts from journals

Research Journal

Research anxiety (7th April 2012)

'As I write this today, I haven't started to schedule any of the interviews yet and my internal parent is telling me to get on with it. What is holding me back? What is the point of delaying? It is time to explore what is going on for me, particularly the feelings that I have about getting started. I feel overwhelmed right now; what started as a simple piece of research involving a set of structured interviews has grown arms and legs. I am looking at doing four sessions with each of the participants and my rational self knows that I am likely to get solid data from these but the thought of the work that is associated with this. I am scared at the thought of the amount of data I will generate. But it is more than that; the real fear is what if I do all this and I can't prove anything! I guess I am always anxious about starting something new and if I think about my day job, I am interviewing people all the time and I have no idea whether anything concrete will come out that I can work with. So why am I scared about this, after all it is just another piece of research and it will be what it will be? Just writing this down has been a sort of release for me and I can get on with it now. It is just another set of data collection interviews and it is no different from what I do every time a client invites me to make a proposal for a project. So I am committing to start scheduling the first stage interviews tomorrow.'

Stage one interviews (25th July 2012)

'Feeling slightly agitated after two stage one interviews today, which I think is frustration with the responses of the participants I interviewed. I found them very reluctant to consider that their unconscious minds might be influencing their work. It is almost as though they are determined to hold on to an ideal persona. Find myself doing analysis of how these participants might be coaching, and of course I know at a logical level that is not the work. I am realising that I am so close to the concept of the unconscious mind that it might be getting in the way of clear thinking and analysis. I need to pay attention when I listen to the recording to how I am interacting with the participants, impartial observer or psychodynamic coach. Reminding myself of the fundamental concepts of psychodynamic models and the notion that we create a persona that we present to the world. I will re-engage with the theory which looks on the psyche as having limitless activity, with thoughts and feelings not always immediately available to a person's current state of mind. The participants are where they are, as am I!'

Supervision journal

'Who am I in this process?' (25th August 2012)

'My next supervision session is three days away and a few things are rumbling around for me in relation to how I experience myself in the interview process. I am so conscious of stepping out of what I would call my natural role and the internal turmoil I am feeling as a result of that. It is as though I have created a very rigid boundary around the day job to make sure I don't step into the natural role, and in doing that, I am limiting myself in my researcher role. I am wondering if I am creating artificial boundaries that are getting in the way of me being present. And given that I am researching the unconscious mind and its potential influence on the coaching process, what might be happening in my unconscious that could be influencing the research process? Also thinking that there might be a parallel process running; perhaps the participants are trying to be perfect coaches and maybe I am trying to be a perfect researcher.'

Ethical practice (2nd February 2013)

'At the stage of stating to analyse the data and notice my concern about doing this ethically. Trying to pin down what it actually is that I am concerned about is difficult for me, I guess there is something around the thought of actually sitting down and doing the analysis and what might emerge that I hadn't thought about. The sorts of questions that are floating around are to do with protecting anonymity; it is a small sample and the thesis will be available in the learning libraries of my partners in this project, what if people can identify themselves or their colleagues can identify them? What if the organisation doesn't like the outcome? What if I do something that is harmful to the participants or the organisation? At a logical level, I get that this is grandiosity but I feel quite scared. This is a supervision issue but it is also a research issue, so a good step might be to consider ethical choices. I am also thinking back to some of the things that came up when I was writing the project proposal and work I was doing with EATA on the development of a new professional code of ethics. I wanted to take a deontological approach with my ethical framework and to follow the principles of reciprocity: avoidance of wrong and fairness. I think my supervision question might be to look at the principles in the context of the concerns I have.'

Reflexive Journal

Third Stage Interviews (28th January 2013)

'I am sitting looking at an imago I have created of the research participants, the parties to the learning contract and the organisations involved. The metaphorical landscape is interesting me. I notice that I am quite distant from the parties to the learning contract and the organisations and reflecting that there may be pros and cons to that. I like that they are there in the background but not in my way, so not between me and the participants. I get a sense that this is a good thing because I am not overly concerned with the organisational presence in the research, and I don't think I am diluting the work for fear of upsetting the organisation.'

I am encircled by the eight participants; six of them are facing me and two are looking away from me towards the organisation. At one level, I feel close to the participants, but when I look at this imago, I move the two who are looking at the organisation further away from me. Accepting that I find these two more challenging to work with and harbouring a fantasy that they are not quite fully engaged in the research, maybe they are concerned about the final report and how it will look to the organisation.'

Note to self to recreate the imago as I listen to the recordings of the third stage interviews and pay attention to my way of being. I am really interested to see if I do stay cleanly in the role of researcher. How might this influence my interpretation and creation of the findings?'

*'**Worthy topic for supervision.'*

Beliefs, values and assumptions (27th December 2015)

After a very long break, I am working on my thesis again and going through the transcripts to decide which to use as examples in the final document. Doing this is causing me to challenge, my beliefs, values and assumptions about both the theory I am testing and the conclusion I am drawing from the data analysis. I believe that the theory has worth, so how do I do justice to this whilst at the same time being sceptical of it? What are the questions I have to ask myself at this point?

'How might my training, experience, professional practice and frame of reference influence my interpretation of the data?'

'How do I make sure the participants' voices are heard?'

'What do I want and need to give voice to?'

'What might I hold back on?'

'What do I know I will be subjective about?'

'How will I deal with that?'

'Where does the power lie in this research project and where do I put myself in the power hierarchy?'

These don't seem like questions I can sit down and answer straight away. I think this is engagement in on-going process of reflection and challenge. I will take these thoughts to supervision but I am also interested in some peer perceptions and feedback. I will ask a couple of people to do this with me; one that is engaged in the theory with the same passion as I am and one who is less so.

Appendix 4 - Letter to research participants

Dear

Doctor of Professional Studies (Coaching) – Research Project

Thank you for making contact regarding the above-mentioned project. I appreciate your interest and your willingness to participate. You will have already received a document entitled 'An Overview for Learning Partners and Participants', which I trust will have answered some of the questions you may have about the project and your involvement. I appreciate you may have some questions or concerns and I would like to address these at the start of our first session, which is scheduled to take place on (insert time and date) at (insert venue); accordingly, I would ask that you allow an additional 30-45 minutes for this first session. If you are unable to keep this appointment, I would appreciate early notification.

I am interested in eliciting data and understanding from this data the meaning that you hold about the research topic. I have a genuine interest in understanding how you make meaning of your work as a coach, how this may or may not influence your behaviour and consequently impact on your work. Accordingly, I will be inviting you to step into a reflective space at each of the three stages of the research process and to share your thoughts, feelings and actions with me. I am committed, throughout this process, to working from a place of curiosity and I will not be judging your way of being or your work with your clients.

There will be a post research session, during which I will ask you to reflect on the research process and any learning you may have taken from it.

In order to start the reflective process, I would ask you to consider the following questions in preparation for our first meeting:

About the research (to help our contracting process)

- What questions would you like to ask that you thought you couldn't ask?
- What might get in the way of this being a good experience for you?
- What unspoken concerns do you have about your involvement in the research?

- What do you need from me to help you fully engage in the process?
- What permission do you need to give yourself to help you fully engage in the process?
- What learning can you expect to get from your engagement in the research?

About coaching (for background information only)

- What attracted you to coaching?
- What keeps you attracted to coaching?
- What don't you enjoy about coaching?
- What are the challenges you face as a coach?

I will be pleased to hear any other reflections that you wish to share with me, so please don't consider this to be an exhaustive list.

I look forward to seeing you for the first session; in the meantime, if you have any questions which it would be helpful to have answered before we meet, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Alexandra Stewart MProf; TSTA (O); PCC

Appendix 5 - List of core questions at each stage in the research process

Stage one:

NB:

1. The interviews started with the questions which were contained in the letter sent to research participants.
 2. Those questions marked * were not necessarily asked in all interviews because some of the participants answered in the context of the previous question.
 3. These are the core questions and all participants were asked laddering questions to elucidate further data; these were different for each participant. (See sample transcripts in Appendix x.)
- ‘What is your purpose in coaching?’
 - ‘How do you define coaching?’
 - ‘And what is it like for you to experience coaching in that way?’
 - ‘How do you define yourself as a coach?’
 - ‘What is your role in the process?’
 - ‘What accountability do you have in the coaching process?’
 - ‘What authority do you have in the process?’
 - ‘To what extent do you experience coachees relating to you as an authority figure?’
 - ‘How do you perceive the roles of the parties to the coaching contract, you as the coach, the coachee and the sponsor?’
 - ‘What emotional resources do you need as a coach?’

- 'How do you manage to access these resources in your work?'
- 'If coaching were a season, which season would it be?'
- 'What connections do you make between (season) and coaching?'
- 'To what extent is that your experience of coaching?'
- 'If you were to describe yourself as a season, which season would you be?'
- 'What caused you to choose the season you did?'
- 'If I were to see you work as a coach, what would I see you doing that could cause me to notice that you were that season?'
- 'How might your experience of yourself influence your work as a coach?'
- 'If you were to describe the organisation as a season, which season would it be?'
- 'What is it like for you to have a professional relationship with an organisation that you experience as that particular season?''*
- 'How might how your experience of the organisation influence your work as a coach?'
- 'Thinking generally about your coaches, which season would you use to describe them?'
- 'What is it about these coachees that caused you to experience them as (season)?' *
- 'What is it like for you to work with coachees who you experience as that particular season?'
- 'How might how your experience of them influence your work as a coach?'
- 'Thinking about the sponsors (line managers) you contract with which season would you use to describe them?'
- 'What is it about your experience of the sponsors that caused you to choose the season you did?''*

- ‘What is it like for you to contract with sponsor that you experience as that particular season?’
- ‘How might how your experience of the sponsors influence your work as a coach?’
- ‘Thinking about the contracting process for coaching how does your experience of the coachee and the sponsor manifest itself behaviourally?’
- ‘How might that experience impact on how you work in the contracting session?’
- ‘How might your perceptions influence your work in the coaching process?’
- ‘Before we finish what else do you want to say?’

Stage 2

These are the core questions and all participants were asked laddering questions to elucidate further data, these were different for each participant. (See sample transcripts – Appendix 7.)

- ‘When you are ready, look at the toys in front of you and choose one that represents how you experience yourself as a coach in the relationship you have chosen to explore.’
- ‘In what way do you experience yourself as similar to (symbol named)?’
- ‘How might be that influencing your work as a coach?’

A variation of the second and third questions were then asked in relation to the coachee, the sponsor, the organisation and the coaching process.

- ‘What is it about the (name the party or process) that causes you to experience them as (name the symbol)?’
- ‘How might that be influencing your work?’
- ‘How might that be impacting your relationships?’

Following the creation of the group imago, the first question was:

- 'What is your reaction when you look at this?'
- Towards the end of the process, the research subject was invited to look at authority, accountability, power and emotional resources.
- 'How are you experiencing your emerging story?'
- 'How do you feel?'
- 'As you reflect on the relationships and the coaching process, how might these be influenced by your unconscious mind?'

Closing statements/questions

- 'I want to give you a few minutes to reflect to check if there is anything else you want to say.'
- 'Notice if there is anything that has emerged today that you would like to leave behind.'

Stage 3

Participants were in charge of this part of the process in that they chose when to pause the recording to reflect. This was a much more fluid process, with fewer core questions being asked. The following are examples.

- 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?'
- 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'
- 'What changes in your imago?'
- 'And how is that impacting on your work?'
- 'How is what you are noticing impacting on the relationships?'
- 'What are you noticing about authority in this relationship?'

- 'What are you accountable for in this relationship?'
- 'What emotional resources are you using in this relationship?'
- 'How do you experience yourself as ... (dependent on what emerged)?'
- 'What thoughts do you have about the impact of the unconscious mind on the coaching process?'

Post research meeting

- 'How did you experience the research interview process?'
- 'What new information, if any, do you have about the coaching process?'
- 'What new information, if any, do you have about your own process?'
- 'What new information, if any, do you have about your work?'
- 'What do you noticed has been reinforced in these areas?'
- 'In what ways, if any, has involvement in the research changed your practice?'

Appendix 6 - Anonymised transcript showing an example of an emergent theme

The following text is an example of an emergent theme and how it was analysed. The emergent is named and then the verbatim text is analysed. The descriptive comments remain close to what the participant said, whilst the interpretative ones are more speculative and represent what I believe is the deeper meaning. The descriptive comments are what I considered to be the social level of the interaction, that is what is actually being said, whilst the interpretative comments are the psychological level of the interaction, that is, what is actually meant. The interpretative comments are a representation of my understanding rather than a fact. I paid attention to the use of what I heard as grandiose as well as discounting language. The queries and ideas column was reserved for my ideas, where, if they appeared consistently or in other ways that they could add to the understanding, they might be useful; otherwise they were disregarded.

The emergent themes were tentative at this stage, more akin to loose ideas taking form than firm labels. There was an average of 45 themes per participant. Each theme was seen to apply on average three times. Having completed this process with each participant's transcripts, I then worked with the emergent themes in an attempt to cluster them, and gradually a shape started to take form. Some themes fell in importance, being either weak or subsumed under stronger themes. Having established this tentative understanding of a participant, I then moved on to the next one, repeating the process.

The result of this work are shown in the theme trees in figures 2, 3 and 4.

Emergent theme	Verbatim	Descriptive	Interpretative	Queries and ideas
Coaching is a calling	<p>'I think I was always a coach; I just didn't have a name for what I was doing. I think it is a latent talent. But the training really helped me to capitalise on what was in me all the time. As far back as I can remember, I was always helping people find their way; my mum used to comment on it. I remember feeling good about helping and getting encouragement from my mum. Could I have done it without training? Well, I think I was doing it. I don't think the training shaped me really, just helped me to articulate what I do in a more understandable way. I guess I am a helper; that is what I have always done. People naturally turn to me for help.</p>	<p>Coaching is a way of being and something that lies within the individual.</p> <p>Training draws out what is already there.</p> <p>Coaching can be done without formal training.</p> <p>Formal training helps make coaching understandable for others it does not create the coach.</p> <p>Coaching is a 'helping' activity.</p>	<p>Some people can do this without training.</p> <p>Training is a way of legitimising what I do.</p> <p>I get 'rewarded' for being who I am, encouragement from parents.</p> <p>I am a helper.</p> <p>People seek me out because I can do this naturally.</p> <p>I am solid in my identity as a coach and I don't need external validation.</p> <p>I know who I am and what I do.</p>	<p>Is part of the coach's identity to be a rescuer?</p> <p>Could the systemic role be played out?</p>

Appendix 7 - Examples of transcripts

Purpose

In this appendix, I share transcripts from each stage in the research process, one for an internal coach and the other for an external coach. My intention in this is to show the reader how the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences changed and deepened over time.

Internal Coach (IC T1) – First stage interview

This stage in the process is a semi-structured interview. I am using open questions and questions which invite reflection using metaphor. (R refers to the researcher and P to participant.)

R1: 'I sent you a few reflective questions in my letter confirming your participation and I'd like to start with them if that is okay with you?'

P1: 'Yeah, sure.'

R2: 'What attracted you to coaching?'

P2: 'I did a three-day foundation skills course for managers and I really enjoyed it, I guess it got me hooked.'

R3: 'And what keeps you attracted to coaching?'

P3: 'I get a real buzz out of it; to be honest, the day job is very challenging at the moment and I think coaching keeps me motivated.'

R4: 'When you say you get a buzz out of it, what does that mean for you?'

P4: 'Hmm, well I enjoy it, it is a protected time when I am completely focussed on another person, it is all I am thinking about moment by moment, you know the challenges of my day job are on the back burner.'

R5: 'What don't you enjoy about coaching?'

- P5: 'Nothing. Well unless you count the three-way contracting meeting. I still get anxious about having these but I don't count that as coaching.'
- R6: 'What are the challenges you face as a coach?'
- P6: 'I don't think I have any challenges as a coach, or maybe I just don't notice them. Well actually I suppose as an internal coach one of the challenges is that I often know the person or people the coachee is talking about and it can be hard to keep quiet about that.'
- R7: 'I am wondering if there were any other reflections you had as you thought about these questions.'
- P7: 'No.'
- R8: 'I would like ask you a few questions that are general in nature, if that is okay with you?'
- P8: 'Sure.'
- R9: 'What is your purpose in coaching?'
- P9: 'I would say my purpose in coaching is to be a challenging colleague who helps the coachee step back from the issues they face and look at things from a different perspective'
- R10: 'And how do you define coaching?'
- P10: 'This is not mine inasmuch as I didn't think it up but it is what I use, so the aim of coaching is to facilitate the learning and development of the coachee without prescription.'
- R11: 'And what is it like for you to experience coaching in that way?'
- P11: 'It is freeing; you know we go on a journey together and I am just a facilitator. I don't have the answers, I help the coachee find the answers.'
- R12: 'How do you define yourself as a coach?'

- P12: 'A trusted colleague, you know a companion on the journey, nothing hierarchical in the relationship.'
- R13: 'What is your role in the process?'
- P13: 'Well to facilitate, but I guess you are looking for me to describe that a bit more. My task is to help the coachee to learn, to find their path, to grow and develop.'
- R14: 'What accountability do you have in the coaching process?'
- P14: 'For maintaining my own professional standards and ethics.'
- R15: 'And ... (research subject interrupts)'
- P15: 'No, it is more than that: I am accountable for working competently, for doing what my coaching bio says I will do; you know, following through my promise.'
- R16: 'What authority do you believe you have in the process?'
- P16: 'I don't have any authority, it is not a power based relationship, it a supportive relationship.'
- R17: 'And how do you experience the coachees you work with in this context, to what extent do they relate to you as an authority figure?'
- P17: 'Yeah, I think there is something in that; particularly at the start of the coaching contract, there tends to be a bit of deference and I do get invited to give them the answers. So yeah, at the start they do tend to relate to me as though I was their manager, but I push back on that.'
- R18: 'How do you experience them when you push back?'
- P18: 'This is generalising a bit, but I gently remind them that I am not going to tell them what I think they should do.'
- R19: 'How do you perceive the roles of the parties to the coaching contract: you as coach, the coachee and the sponsor?'

- P19: 'I think we are all working towards the same goal but and so we all have a part to play. My role is to work with the coachee, to challenge them, to point out what I am noticing, the invite them to see things differently and so on. I think the role of the coachee is to come to the process openly and be willing to engage. I think the sponsor's role is to help the coachee transfer any learning they get from coaching back into the workplace and to offer feedback and encouragement.'
- R20: 'What emotional resources do you need as a coach?'
- P20: 'You need to be detached, I think you need to be able to be objective and I think you need to be able to hold the process.'
- R21: 'I notice you using thinking language and the third person in replying to that question, and so with what you have said in mind, what emotional resources do you need as a coach?'
- P21: 'Resilience sums it up for me. Whatever happens in the coaching process, the coach needs to be able to hold it together for themselves and the coachee. I think that is why supervision is important, though, you know, you get support through the supervision process'.
- R22: 'This question relates to how you perceive coaching and I am asking you to consider your response using metaphor. If coaching were a season, which season would it be?'
- P22: 'Oh spring, definitely spring.'
- R23: 'And what connections do you make between spring and coaching?'
- P23: 'Oh it is coming out of the darkness and into the light. You know it is the time when we see things start to grow.'
- R24: 'And to what extent is that your experience of coaching?'
- P24: 'Oh definitely it is. People come to coaching generally because they are stuck, and I see them in a dark place. Coaching helps them to come into the light and to see the potential for growth.'
- R25: 'If you were to describe yourself as a season, which season would you be?'

- P25: 'Spring describes me because I am bringing enough warmth and light to support growth but I am tough enough to expect the coachee to push through the difficulties.'
- R26: 'If I were to see you work as a coach, what would I see you doing that would cause me to notice that you were spring?'
- P:26 'You would see me shining a light on the issue or challenge the coachee is facing, you would notice my energy and you would see the coachee grow as a result of the work we are doing, and by grow, I mean getting more awareness and being ready to push through the difficulties.'
- R27: 'How might how your experience of yourself influence your work as a coach?'
- P27: 'I think in a positive way, I think it creates confidence and motivation.'
- R28: 'If I asked you to describe the organisation using the metaphor of a season, what would you say?'
- P28: 'I'm struggling a bit to see this from an organisational context without getting caught up in my thoughts about the culture. I think spring as well, and I say that because I think the organisation is offering coaching for personal and professional growth and to help people come out of the darkness into the light.'
- R29: 'What is it like for you to have a professional relationship with an organisation that you experience as that season?'
- P29: 'I have never thought about that but it is encouraging, you get a sense the organisation cares enough to help people.'
- R30: 'How might your experience of the organisation as spring influence your work as a coach?'
- P30: 'I don't think the organisation or how I experience it comes into it really. I don't think about having a relationship with the organisation when I am working as a coach, it is a bit faceless, but now when I think again, of course I have a relationship with the organisation, they pay me.'

- R31: 'In your experience of the coachees that you have worked with, generally, what season would you say they are?'
- P31: 'Oh I think (laughs) they would say spring.'
- R32: 'And you laughed as you said that. So if they would say spring, what would you say?'
- P32: 'I did laugh and I suppose would say autumn.'
- R33: 'And what was it about those people that caused you to experience them autumn?'
- P33: 'I think to start with they were more difficult to work with, yes, that is it; there was a tiredness to them in how they worked with me. Autumn, yes, it was as though they were in a fallow period.'
- R34: 'And I notice you say a few people; as a percentage of the number you have worked with, what would it be?'
- P34: 'Actually this is making me realise that it is a higher number than I thought, it is probably pretty close to 65%.'
- R35: 'What is it like for you to work with coachees that you experience as autumn?'
- P35: 'Autumn is a time for harvesting, so I help the coachee to harvest their skills, knowledge and experience and to notice what they have in the larder.'
- R36: 'How might your experience of them influence your work as a coach?'
- P36: 'I don't think it does; all coachees challenge me in some way, so I am not sure it makes any difference to the relationship. I just accept that they are where they are.'
- R37: 'I am wondering if you have any further reflections on this that you want to share.'
- P37: 'I am finding answering these questions interesting because I think I might have a bit of a blind spot because I feel so positively about coaching.'
- R38: 'What is it you feel positive about?'

- P38: 'Well, there is a feel good factor to coaching and helping someone move forward, I get a real buzz out of it and I want everyone to feel as positive as I do.'
- R39: 'What is the buzz you get?'
- P39: 'That is a good question and I am facing up to my own reality here; the buzz is I get to feel good about myself?'
- R40: 'How would you say you experience sponsors in the coaching process again using the metaphor of seasons?'
- P40: 'It's difficult to generalise, and yet it isn't because I experience them as either autumn or winter.'
- R41: 'What is it about your experience of them that caused you to choose the seasons you did?'
- P41: 'They don't seem to be getting any light.'
- R42: 'And what it is about them that causes you to experience them in this way?'
- P42: 'You know, it is either the lack of energy, you know like they are weighed down, little shoots that have been trodden into the ground or it is a lack of vision, as though they are stumbling about in the dark waiting for daylight to appear. Actually, when I think more about this, it is as though they are getting loads of fertiliser thrown on them in the hope that they will grow, but it is actually stunting them.'
- R43: 'How might your experience of the sponsors influence your work as a coach?'
- P43: 'I don't think it does but sometimes I want to suggest that they get coaching, they give support to team members but don't seem to get any.'
- R44: 'I appreciate you sharing that with me but I would like to bring your attention back to your experience as a coach in the contracting process. So, thinking about your experience of the coachee and the sponsor, how does that manifest itself behaviourally?'
- P44: 'A lot of the time the sponsor seems to be pushing the agenda and the coachee is fairly quiet, as though they are disconnected in some way. Other situations are

different though, more equal, it is hard to generalise. In the first example, I have to work harder to bring the coachee into the contracting process.'

R45: And how might that impact on how you work in the contracting session?'

P45: 'Hmm. I probably take the coachee's side in the process; maybe I am making judgements about the sponsor.'

R46: 'How might that influence your work as a coach?'

P46: 'That is a big question. Or is it? Maybe I am simplifying this but I don't think it influences how I work as a coach. I follow a process, I meet everyone as an individual, coachee and sponsor, and I treat them with dignity and respect. I think coach training helped me to keep my own perceptions out of the way and show empathic understanding but at the same time challenging the coachee. I just notice that this is how I am experiencing the various parties to the relationship.'

R47: 'I hear a slight hesitation as you answer that question.'

P47: 'Yes, I am now wondering if I am not paying enough attention to that, it is just causing me to reflect. If I go back to reflecting on how I experience myself in the process, I am definitely late spring/early summer and I think that means that I bring a lot of positive energy and probably see it as my job to do that.'

R48: 'Thank you for your willingness to reflect again. Thinking this time about the potential impact on the relationship you have with the parties to the coaching process, how might your perceptions be impacting on the relationships?'

P48: 'See I am tempted to say right off that there is no impact, that I am paying attention to managing boundaries and staying in role. And that is true when I am in the moment with the coachee and the line manager. I am sticking with that although my gut tells me that maybe I could do with a bit of further reflection'.

R49: 'So thank you for your input, that as far as we take it today, but before we finish I want to check if there is anything else you want to say?'

P49: 'No, nothing comes to mind.'

Second stage interview – using symbolic representation

- R1: 'Thanks for continuing to take part in this process. Before we start, I am wondering if there is anything from last time that we need to talk about?'
- P1: 'No. I read over the transcript you sent me and I reflected quite a lot and I am curious about today.'
- R2: 'So, today I am inviting you to look again at yourself, the coachee, the sponsor, the organisation and the coaching process and this time I will ask you to work with symbols in order to do the exploration. We talked about this in the early stages of the research and I recall that you told me you were familiar with this method and often use it with coachees.'
- P2: 'Yes I do, I am very familiar with it and I am looking forward to this part because I know it can create awareness.'
- R3: 'So, it is okay with you that we will start?'
- P3: 'Yes fine.'
- R4: 'So for the purpose of this stage you will recall that I asked you to think specifically on one coachee that you have worked with.'
- P4: 'Yes, I have someone in mind and I have chosen someone that I didn't seem to have any issues but felt I needed supervision on.'
- R5: 'So, when you are ready look at the toys in front of you and choose one that represents how you experience yourself as a coach in the relationship you have chosen to explore. Notice what you are drawn to intuitively and don't overthink the choice.'
- P5: 'I love the little Mickey Mouse wizard and I am stopping picking it up because it seems a bit egotistical and you might think I am a bit full of myself.'
- R6: 'I am interested in what we both might learn from this and would encourage you to go with what you are drawn to with no self-censorship. I am not censoring you.'
- P6: 'Right! Mickey Mouse the magician it is.'

- R7: 'So as you hold Mickey in your hand, in what way do you experience yourself as similar to him?'
- P7: 'Wow that is hard; I am having to own up to feeling a little bit magical in the coaching process?'
- R8: 'And what does it mean for you to be magical?'
- P8: 'I don't have to work hard and yet I can create amazing results; you know I wave the magic wand. But I am not the magical instrument, I am just the conduit for it. Yeah, that is not true. I do like being the magician and I think I do that in all my professional roles.'
- R9: 'So keeping our attention on you as a coach, in what other ways are you experiencing yourself as similar to Mickey?'
- P9: 'I am amazed at how easily this answer came, because I am not a real character, I am a player in show.'
- R10: 'What does it mean for you not to be a real character, to be a player in a show?'
- P10: 'Hmmm; that is a tough question to face up to. I think I take on a role when I am coaching and I step into the coaching space. I do all the things I am supposed to do on the stage'.
- R11: 'And in accepting that may be your truth, how might that be influencing your work as a coach?'
- P11: 'You know I think coaching is so different from what I do every day in my job that I do see myself putting on a costume and stepping on to a stage.'
- R12: 'And what does that mean for you in terms of how you experience yourself when you put on that costume and step on to the stage?'
- P12: 'I feel safe and I believe anything is possible. I guess I believe in myself and in coaching as a process.'
- R13: 'And how does having that belief impact on how you experience yourself?'

- P13: 'Oh here comes the grandiosity again, I feel invincible, I can do anything, I can make this work.'
- R14: 'And how does that impact on how you work?'
- P14: 'Positively I think, it means I never give up on anyone. Maybe I just move from one magic spell to another?'
- R15: 'And what does that mean for you?'
- P15: 'I think I maybe take too much responsibility.'
- R16: 'So, I would like to invite you to hold that and to move on but I want to check if there is anything else you want to say?'
- P16: 'No, I can't think of anything and I am fine with what is coming up.'
- R17: 'So, please choose a symbol to represent your coachee, again noticing what you are drawn to and avoiding overthinking.'
- P17: 'So, I am choosing much more easily this time and not censoring myself. I choose the cat.'
- R18: 'And what is it about your coachee that causes you to experience her as a cat? And I notice I make an assumption that it is a she and please don't confirm or deny that.'
- P18: 'The coachee has that look of inner knowing but doesn't give anything away. I feel like she knows all the answers but she is holding on to them. Yes, a bit like the Cheshire cat from Alice in Wonderland, that is how I experience this person.'
- R19: 'And what is it about this person that causes you to experience them as the Cheshire cat?'
- P19: 'She is a bit mysterious and unpredictable?'
- R20: 'What does that mean for you?'

- P20: 'I find her hard to read; I think there is a lot about her I don't know. Sometimes she is very engaged and just when I think we are establishing trust, she moves away and become mysterious again.'
- R21: 'And how might that be influencing your work with her?'
- P21: 'I think I work hard to uncover the mystery and I think that is okay; I want to be curious but again I work hard with her.'
- R22: 'So I would like to invite you to move on but before we do, just check if there is anything else you want to say.'
- P22: 'Yes, I chose a little cat and I notice there is a much bigger one; she is definitely bigger so I am going to swap for the bigger one?'
- R23: 'And what do you notice is similar or different now that you have the bigger one in your hand?'
- P23: 'Blimey, I notice she is much bigger than me?'
- R24: 'And how might that be impacting on your relationship?'
- P24: 'I don't know, but my guess is that it is impacting, but I just don't know; can we leave it at I don't know?'
- R25: 'Of course so I am inviting you now to choose a toy to represent the sponsor, again following the same process.'
- P25: 'So, again this is easy I choose a little mouse – oh my goodness this is throwing up some information for me. Maybe I do need to take this coachee to supervision.'
- R26: 'I trust that you will make the decision that is right for you on that. Are you okay to stay with the research process?'
- P26: 'Yes, I am really not concerned but I am very curious.'
- R27: 'So, what is it about the sponsor that causes you to experience them as a mouse?'

- P27: 'Well, partly it is the rushing around, scuttling around almost. I have only been in the sponsor's company twice and always with the coachee present, but when I think about it now there is a nervousness that I pick up'.
- R28: 'And how might that impact on your relationship with the line manager?'
- P28: 'I am not sure it does, I don't feel that I have a relationship with her. It is just something I notice.'
- R29: 'And now will you choose a toy to represent the organisation please?'
- P29: 'Oh the train.'
- R30: 'And what is it about the organisation that causes you to experience it as a train?'
- P30: 'It is not just a train it is a runaway train, out of control and crashing into everything in its way?'
- R31: 'And how might your experience of the organisation as a runaway train being influencing your work?'
- P31: 'I want to say I don't know but that is not helping you.'
- R32: 'This is not about helping me, if you don't know, then I accept that you don't know.'
- P32: 'I have experienced myself as protecting the others from the organisation so that could be it.'
- R33: 'So you have experienced yourself doing that but I am hearing a curiosity.'
- P33: 'Definitely, yes, I am curious.'
- R34: 'So, finally please choose a toy which represents how you are experiencing the coaching process.'
- P34: 'Dora the Explorer, that is it.'
- R35: 'You sound definite about that, what is it about the coaching process that causes you to experience it as Dora the Explorer?'

- P35: 'Well, if you know Dora's story then you will know that she goes round in a cycle of facing obstacles, riddles and puzzles and overcomes them all in the end. She does have help from a talking monkey though.'
- R36: 'And where is the talking monkey in the coaching process?'
- P36: 'Do you know, I think the talking monkey is in me; I am constantly working to solve the puzzles, obstacles and riddles.'
- R37: 'And where does this sit in relation to Mickey the magician?'
- P37: 'Well, I think Mickey is there to use all the magic he can in case the monkey and Dora fail.'
- R38: 'So, if I understand you, it seems that you are experiencing yourself as three characters.'
- P38: 'I think I am getting myself in a muddle (picks up Dora toy). Actually, Dora and the monkey are how I experience the coaching process; yes, that is it. The coaching process follows a cycle and there are riddles and puzzles to solve, bridges to cross, but all is well in the end. Yes I think that is it, I trust the coaching process.'
- R39: 'And coming back to Mickey reflect on how you experience yourself as a coach in this relationship, what comes up for you?'
- P39: 'It is back to the magic, much as I don't like to admit it, if I am being honest, I experience myself as magical or at least that is how I want to experience myself.'
- R40: 'So that is how you want to experience yourself, in what way is that different or similar to your actual experience of yourself?'
- P40: 'I think I am in denial; I do experience myself as magical. Oh that sounds awful when I hear myself say it because logically I know it is not about me.'
- R41: 'And what other thoughts or feelings come to you?'
- P41: 'I want to put Mickey back and chose another toy, one that is less showy'.
- R42: 'And how would that change things?'

P42: (Laughs) 'It wouldn't, I would be hiding from myself and my experiences; it is my gremlin telling me I am showing off. I am staying with Mickey I think there is something here for me to learn.'

R43: 'So before we move on, I am wondering if there is anything else you want to say.'

P43: 'No this is so interesting, and I knew it would be, I use this method with coachees but, wow, being on the receiving end of it really causes me to think.'

R44: 'So, with the toys you have in front of you, I am inviting you to create your imago, the mental picture you hold of how you are experiencing all these characters in relation to one another. When you are ready, arrange the toys into your imago.'

P44: 'I am taking a bit of time on this; it is because I am trying to bring the experience to life in my mind.'

R45: 'Take as much time as you need.'

P45: 'So this is my imago.'

The coachee arranged the imago in such a way that the cat (client) is in the centre; Mickey Mouse (the participant) is face-to-face with the cat; Dora (the coaching process) is on Mickey's right-hand side and very close; the mouse (the sponsor) is off to one side and the train (the organisation) is circling the group.

R46: 'And what is your reaction when you look at this?'

P46: 'I think it really is a true reflection of my experience, the train (the organisation) is holding everything together but in a constraining way.'

R47: 'In what way are you experiencing the train as constraining?'

P47: 'I think because of how things are in the organisation, you know there is a huge change programme, and everything has to be done a certain way; there is no room for manoeuvre.'

R48: 'And earlier you said that it was a runaway train, crashing into things, out of control.'

- P48: 'I did, didn't I? That is a strange contradiction. I think I was muddling my experience of the organisation generally, you know in my day job, rather than in the coaching process.'
- R49: 'And how might that be influencing how you work as a coach?'
- P49: 'I am not sure but I am wondering if I am over-empathic with the coachee, possibly I am.'
- R50: 'So, it sounds as if you are reflecting on your practice with the coachee.'
- P50: 'Definitely, I do think I was muddling the organisation up in my own mind.'
- R51: 'What else is coming up for you as you look at the imago?'
- P51: 'I am looking at how close Dora is to me and I think that is my experience; I hold the coaching process, I feel satisfied as I look at that.'
- R52: 'And how might that be influencing your work?'
- P52: 'Positively, I am close to the process; this makes me think I am managing it well.'
- R53: 'And what about the other characters, what do you notice?'
- P53: 'The sponsor (mouse) is way off to one side and that is how I am experiencing this person, in the process but not, if that makes sense. I really don't feel like I have a relationship with this person.'
- R54: 'And how might that be influencing your work?'
- P54: 'I want to say it isn't at all, but I think that is a bit glib. Let me think about this a bit more.'
- R55: 'I notice you have moved from feeling to thinking.'
- P55: 'Yes, I am bringing logic to it; so I feel a bit anxious that somehow this person is not really in the loop.'
- R56: 'And how might that be influencing your work?'

- P56: 'I think I might be taking all the responsibility for change, you know for letting the sponsor off the hook, and working hard to make sure the goals of the coaching are achieved. I don't know though but I am reflecting on this.'
- R57: 'So what else are you noticing?'
- P57: 'Well, I see that I am facing the coachee and she is in the middle of the imago, but I am not very close to her and that surprises me and yet it doesn't?'
- R58: 'And how might that be influencing how you work with this person?'
- P58: 'I think it does reflect how hard I am finding it to get close to her. I am there with her but not next to her. Actually it looks like a wee bit of a Mexican stand-off.'
- R59: 'And to what extent are you experiencing a Mexican stand-off?'
- P59: 'Well, that was maybe an exaggeration, but I realise that I don't have as close a relationship with her as I do have had with other coachees.'
- R60: 'And how might that be influencing on your work?'
- P60: 'I think I already said this, but I am experiencing this coachee as hard work.'
- R61: 'And what does that mean for you?'
- P61: 'I am working really hard; actually, I think I am trying to perform magic. That is it, I am working hard and keep coming up with the magical tricks and I get very little back. Well that is a bit of an "aha" moment.'
- R62: 'As you look at this how does this fit your purpose in coaching?'
- P62: 'Well, it is looking a little off beam; right now, I am not experiencing development in the coachee or forward movement.'
- R63: 'So what are you experiencing?'
- P63: 'Resistance, and I think I have been ignoring the resistance instead of naming it.'
- R64: 'What are you noticing from this imago about the authority in this relationship?'

P64: 'It is power I am seeing in this, I could say authority and the coachee has it all. Look at her in relation to the rest of us, she is bigger, I am not seeing equality, actually I am not feeling equal.'

R65: 'What are you accountable for in this imago?'

P65: 'I am holding myself accountable to make this work; I am taking all the responsibility; fascinating; I am working hard to make this work, so we are none of us taking the roles we agreed in the contract.'

R66: 'And what emotional resources are you using in this imago?'

P66: 'Energy, tenacity, I feel tired when I look at this?'

R67: 'And how do you experience yourself in the moment with this coachee?'

P67: 'I don't feel tired in the moment with her but I am realising that I am doing all the work.'

R68: 'How are you experiencing your emerging story?'

P68: 'Powerful, insightful, a little scary?'

R69: 'How you do feel?'

P69: 'I feel a little scared that there is so much going on that I wasn't aware of but I'm okay, it is just data.'

R70: 'As you reflect on the relationships and the coaching process, what impact might your unconscious mind have on the relationships and the coaching process?'

P70: 'I don't know the what impact is; but after this session I am clear there is an impact.'

R71: 'We are coming up to the end of this session, but I want to give you a few minutes to reflect and see if there is anything else you want to say.'

P71: 'No I don't think so, I have found this fascinating. I do reflect on my work but this has caused me to reflect in a deeper way.'

R72: 'So, notice if there is anything that has emerged today that you want to leave behind, or let go of.'

P72: 'There really isn't. I was thinking I might get some supervision on this but actually I want to wait until after our next session.'

Third stage interview – indirect observation

The third stage interview involves indirect observation of the coach in action, using a 30-minute recording, and invites the participant to deeper reflection using symbolic representation.

R1: 'Thanks for continuing to take part in this process and before we start, I am wondering if there is anything from last time that we need to talk about.'

P1: 'No, I left with a lot of food for thought though and I have deliberately not listened to the recording I have brought today because I didn't want to maybe influence what comes up today.'

R2: 'In terms of how we work today, I suggest that you recreate your imago and then we listen to the recording. At any point in the recording that you notice something about your interaction, press the pause button and I will invite you to reflect. How does that sound?'

P2: 'That is fine, but I am a bit concerned that I might not notice anything, then what?'

R3: 'I will also be paying attention and I might notice a change in voice tone or tempo, perhaps the way you word something, and with your permission, I will press the pause the button and invite you to reflect.'

P3: 'Yes, I am good with that.'

R4: 'So, I will start with asking you to recreate your imago as it was the last time we were together.'

P4: 'I can remember exactly how it looked.'

The research subject recreates the imago and we check it against the notes. We start to listen to the recording. After 5:22 the research subject presses the pause button.

- R5: 'So what happened there?'
- P5: 'Well I am already doing all the work; I ask her what she wants to get from the session and she tells me that she doesn't know. I heard a slight edge in my voice when I asked her the next question. The edge is, I think, exasperation.'
- R6: 'What is going on in you that causes you to feel exasperation?'
- P6: 'It is a pattern with this person; she never seems to know and now when I think about it, I am frustrated and I am not dealing with my frustration.'
- R7: 'And I notice you change from feeling exasperated to frustrated; what is the difference for you between these two feelings.'
- P7: 'That is an interesting question; I need to think about it. Hmm, you know I think I really feel frustrated and I am not naming that to the coachee. I think exasperation lets me off the hook; you know this is a problem I can't solve.'
- R8: 'Looking at your imago, just notice if there is anything you want to change.'
- P8: 'I am moving myself further away from the coachee; should I just do that?'
- R9: 'If that is what you want to do.'
- P9: 'It is. And now I am stopping myself from moving as far away as I want to, I am censoring myself again.'
- R10: 'Just to remind you this is about your experience in this relationship, not about good or bad, right or wrong. No blame, no shame, no judgement, only curiosity.'
- P10: 'I am moving further away from the coachee.'
- R11: 'And as you move further away, how does that impact on the other characters in the imago?'
- P11: 'Oh interesting! I have just moved myself closer to the sponsor. And that leaves Dora facing the coachee.'
- R12: 'What are you experiencing now as you notice that?'

P12: 'I am leaving the process to run itself; actually, at that moment, I have abandoned the process. And it is interesting that I move closer to the sponsor and if I am being honest there are times when my experience of this person has caused me to feel sorry for her sponsor.'

R13: 'And how might that have impacted on the work you have done with her?'

P13: 'Well I don't know, but maybe something leaks in my voice tone or body language and she picks it up and moves away from me. I don't know, but it will be interesting to continue. Can I start the recording again?'

R14: 'Yes when you are ready.'

We listen to the recording and the research subject pauses at 11.12.

R15: 'So what are you noticing?'

P15: 'I just got a sense there of the organisation being at the core of this and I want to move the train so that it is in the middle of the imago.' (She does this.)

R16: 'And what comes up for you are you look at the imago now?'

P16: 'The organisation is always at the core of our work together; she really seems to be stuck because of how the organisation is at the moment, you know in constant flux and change.'

R17: 'What else did you notice at that point?'

P17: 'I move myself so that I come between her and the train and when I do that I am rescuing her in some way. You know, it is as though I am thinking that train is heading straight for her and I need to stop it.'

R18: 'And how does that reflect what is actually happening in your relationship in this coaching process?'

P18: 'You know I think it does, I am experiencing this person as in danger and I am protecting her.'

R19: 'What else do you notice?'

- P19: 'I think my experience of the organisation is very close to hers and maybe I am being over empathic.'
- R20: 'And how might that be impacting on the work you do with her?'
- P20: 'Well, I am probably not pushing her, no, I am not pushing her to take responsibility for what she can do. Can we listen to that bit again and maybe go a bit further on too.' Research subject rewinds and replays the same piece and allows the recording to run until 13.01.
- P20: 'When I listen to that again, the new imago absolutely makes sense and listen to how I respond her to her; I definitely rescue her at that point because I said, *Yes times are difficult in the organisation*. And I know what I could have said. I am not the magician in this piece of work.'
- R21: 'So who are you if you are not the magician?'
- P21: 'I am the raging bull, ready to attack.'
- R22: 'What does that mean for you in the context of this work with this coachee?'
- P22: 'I need to think about that because this is quite a confusing picture.'
- R23: 'What is confusing about the picture?'
- P23: 'I guess it is what is emerging as I listen to this. I having to face up to not being the magician and maybe I feel a bit frustrated that she is not allowing me that space and then I become her rescuer, protector, shielding her from the organisation. I wonder if there are two things going on here at the same time.'
- R24: 'If you can stay with what you are experiencing in this coaching relationship. So if I understand you rightly, you are potentially frustrated because the magician is not getting her space and so you notice that you change your way of being and become the raging bull, the protector.'
- P24: 'I think that is it, I am taking up two roles, the magic is not working so I become the fighter. That is much closer to who I am in my day job. Yeah, I am stepping out of coaching mode with this person and I am almost becoming her line manager and

because the line manager (*sponsor*) is on the edge of the picture, that space might be free for me?’

R25: ‘And when you step into that role, what do you notice about how the coachee responds to you?’

P25: ‘Oh she is less mysterious and resistant. (laughs) She becomes the fluffy, purring cat.’

R26: ‘And how does that impact on you?’

P26: ‘Well I like her better. Did I just say that? I am colluding with her aren’t I?’

R27: ‘How representative of your relationship with this coachee is the recording we are listening to?’

P27: ‘Well I am not sure, we haven’t listened to it all but I am feeling uncomfortable enough right now to think that this is a pretty true reflection of the relationship.’

R28: ‘How do you feel about listening to some more of the recording?’

P28: ‘Yes I want to.’

We listen to the recoding and the research subject presses the pause button 19:43.

R29: ‘What did you notice there?’

P29: ‘I am doing all the work again; I keep trying and trying to help this person and she is not moving forward.’

R30: ‘I noticed you asked her three questions which she reframed.’

P30: ‘I notice that when I listen to the recording but I didn’t notice it at the time.’

R31: ‘If you look at your imago what, if anything, changed during that last piece we listened to?’

- P31: 'The train goes back to the outside and I am facing her again but not as the bull, as the magician. And so I keep the focus on me working hard to help her. I think she has her back to me at this point, yes she is not facing me.'
- R32: 'And how is that impacting on the work you are doing with her?'
- P32: 'I am over-adapting to her, I am trying to get her to engage with the magic of coaching and she just wants to be protected from the runaway train. And the line manager is really not in the picture.'
- R33: 'I notice your energy has changed and I am curious about that.'
- P33: 'I think you must think I am a pretty useless coach.'
- R34: 'I am sorry you think that, I don't see you in that way. How are you experiencing yourself right now?'
- P34: 'I am angry with myself for not seeing what is going on in this relationship and I am beating myself up. I am also thinking that at some level I knew this was going on because I haven't taken this to supervision.'
- R35: 'What do you want to do right now?'
- P35: 'Give myself permission to learn from this process?'
- R36: 'How might I help you to do that?'
- P36: 'Actually, just having naming what you noticed has helped because I have said out loud what was going on inside me. And I haven't been naming what has been going on inside me in with this coachee.'
- R37: 'How ready are you to listen to some more of the recording?'
- P37: 'I would like to listen to it right through to the end and maybe make some notes as it runs, is that okay?'
- R38: 'I am happy to do that but if notice something that I would like to ask you about can I press the pause button?'

P38: 'Yes of course.'

We listen to the recording and the coachee presses the pause button at 24.39.

R39: 'What did you notice?'

P39: 'This is the last five minutes of the session and the train comes back to the centre of the process. I am asking her what she is taking from the session and she goes back to being helpless. She said *the main thing I am taking away today is that there is nothing I can do about the organisation*. And I sighed when she said that; it was audible that sigh.'

R40: 'What happens to your imago at that point?'

P40: 'Well the train is back in the middle, you know at the core of the process and it is between us. I was a bit hesitant in saying anything after I sighed and I think I was drawn to be the raging bull again.'

R41: 'And yet you noticed you sighed, how does that fit with the raging bull?'

P41: 'It doesn't, the bull's energy is sapped, I feel tired as I listen to this and the magic clearly didn't work.'

R42: 'What was happening with Dora the Explorer, the coaching process at this point?'

P42: 'I think Dora had left the building at that point. You know the process breaks down momentarily.'

R43: 'Shall we listen to the remaining few minutes?'

P43: 'Yes, although I think I can remember what happened.'

We listen to the remaining five minutes of the recording.

R44: 'What happened to your imago in the last five minutes?'

P44: 'I brought the line manager in and I left the train in the middle. I said something about it being true that she couldn't change the organisation and asked her how she could start to accept that. I also asked her how she could get support from her

line manager. I didn't really push her on it though. I didn't become the raging bull but I did feel a bit of rage at the time.'

R45: 'And yet you sighed towards the end and said the bull's energy was sapped, so where did the rage come from?'

P45: 'I'm listening to you replaying what I said and I think I feel rage now in this moment rather than at the end of the session.'

R46: 'And what is the rage about?'

P46: 'I think partly I am angry with myself for how I have been working with this coachee and partly I am angry with the organisation and I am angry with her.'

R47: 'I am mindful that we are in a research process and not a supervision process but from the perspective of keeping you safe, I am wondering what you want to do with that anger?'

P47: 'Actually just naming it has helped.'

R48: 'Is it okay to round off with a few more questions?'

P48: 'Yes.'

R49: 'After listening to the recording, reflecting and reviewing your imago what are you noticing about authority in this relationship?'

P40: 'It is not a relationship of equals; I am not taking up my space as a coach, I am not able to perform magic with this coachee, so I become the raging bull, her rescuer or protector. There is almost a power struggle, the organisation, the coachee and me all battling for power. I mean the organisation has the authority but I experience the coachee as holding the power. I think she does see me as an authority figure, and reaches out to be protected. I step into that authority figure role.'

R41: 'What are you accountable for in this relationship?'

- P41: 'I know what I am actually accountable for and I think we spoke about that last time. What I have become accountable for is protecting this coachee from the 'train crash'.
- R42: 'And what emotional resources are you using in this relationship?'
- P42: 'It isn't so much what emotional resources I am using it more to do with the amount I am using. But that doesn't answer the question; I am using anger; frustration; energy; tenacity; sadness; but also hope.
- R43: 'And how do you experience yourself as you hear these words?'
- P43: 'I actually feel relaxed, lighter, as though I have let go of something.'
- R44: 'What thoughts you have about the impact of the unconscious mind on the coaching process?'
- P44: 'I know the stuff about the psychological level of the contract and the idea of working with the unconscious mind, the theory of it, but this has made it real. It is around the whole time.'
- R45: 'We are coming to the end of this session, but I want to give you a few minutes to reflect to see if there is anything else you want to say.'
- P45: 'No, well yes, I want to say thanks for involving me in this process, I am taking a lot from it.'
- R46: 'Again in the spirit of offering protection, notice if there is anything that has emerged today that you want to get support with.'
- P46: 'I will listen to the recording from today and read the transcript and I feel ready to change how I am working with this person. I am going to take this to supervision not so much to look at what we learned here but more to look at how I might have a blind spot in the way I work with other coachees.
- R47: We have a date in the diary for the post research interview session, so I will see you then.

External Coach (EC T7)

First stage interview

This stage in the process is a semi-structured interview. I am using open questions and questions which invite reflection using metaphor. (R refers to the researcher and P to participant.)

R1: 'I sent you a few reflective questions in my letter confirming your participation and I'd like to start with them if that is okay with you.'

P1: 'Of course'

R2: 'What attracted you to coaching?'

P2: 'I don't know that I was attracted to it; I am a trainer and facilitator and found myself almost getting into coaching by accident. Let me explain that, I use a coaching style in my work, I get good results and I moved into working one-to-one as a coach. It seemed like a natural progression.'

R3: 'And what keeps you attracted to coaching?'

P3: 'I like the intensity of one-to-one work and the depth of the relationship with the coachee.'

R4: 'What do those two things mean to you, the intensity of one-to-one work and the depth of the relationship?'

P4: 'Good question, what does this mean for me ... I think when I say intensity, I think it is the focus, the moment by moment following the coachee and constantly working with what emerges for them. Oh, and the depth of the relationship; I feel a real connection with the coachees I work with and that builds over a period of time. You know I don't get that when I do workshops or facilitation. I feel I make a difference because I see the change happening.'

R5: 'What don't you enjoy about coaching?'

P5: 'Well, I can get frustrated if things are going slowly or if I think the coachee could get more out of the process.'

- R6: 'What are the challenges you face as a coach?'
- P6: 'I think keeping to the contract, especially if it is a three-way contract. What can happen is that the contract gets agreed and then in the first session, the coachee tells me the issue is the boss who is the third party to the contract. It is hard to stay connected and empathic with the coachee and true to the contract. That comes up in supervision quite often.'
- R7: 'I am wondering if there were any other reflections you had as you thought about these questions.'
- P7: 'I didn't at the time I read the questions but now at this stage in the process I am reflecting on what I am going to learn about my process and my practice and actually that's okay.'
- R8: 'I would like ask you a few questions that are general in nature, if that's okay with you?'
- P8: 'Go ahead.'
- R9: 'What is your purpose in coaching?'
- P9: 'To create a safe space for people to reflect on challenges and to find ways to rise above these challenges.'
- R10: 'And how do you define coaching?'
- P10: 'I use the ICF definition or at least my version of that, so I say coaching is working in partnership with coachees in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.'
- R11: 'And what is it like for you to experience coaching in that way?'
- P11: 'When I hear myself say this it is quite liberating because of the partnership piece, however when I think about the words thought provoking, creative and inspire that seems like a huge responsibility, but that is not how I experience coaching when I am in it.'
- R12: 'How do you experience yourself when you are in it?'

P12: 'Confident and relaxed.'

R13: 'How do you define yourself as a coach?'

P13: 'Oh that is an easier question, I am a learning partner.'

R14: 'What is your role in the process?'

P14: 'To support, encourage and challenge the coachee.'

R15: 'What accountability do you have in the coaching process?'

P15: 'Well I have a number of accountabilities, for example, to keep the coachee focussed on the contracted outcomes, to work ethically and competently. And to be true to my word.'

R16: 'And to be true to your word, what does that mean for you?'

P16: 'Well, doing what I say I am going to do, working with integrity, being honest.'

R17: 'What authority do you have in the process?'

P17: 'I don't see the relationship as based on authority; it is an egalitarian relationship.'

R18: 'To what extent do you experience coachees relating to you as an authority figure?'

P18: 'Hmm, to be honest this is making me think quite deeply. I guess I do experience some coachees as a bit adapted at the start of the process.'

R19: 'What does that experience of being a bit adapted mean for you?'

P19: 'I often get a sense that they are trying to please me, maybe in the way that you might do with an authority figure.'

R20: 'How do you perceive the roles of the parties to the coaching contract: you as coach, the coachee and the sponsor?'

- P20: 'I think my role is to challenge, support and encourage; the coachee's role is to fully engage in the process and the sponsor's role is to help the coachee through challenging; supporting and encouraging in the work environment.'
- R21: 'What emotional resources do you need as a coach?'
- P21: 'I think it is objectivity, but maybe more than that, I need to be empathic but also not to be fazed or overwhelmed by what I am hearing.'
- R22: 'And how do you manage to access these resources in your work?'
- P22: 'Well maybe I don't all the time, maybe that will come out in this process. It is hard to stay neutral.'
- R23: 'This question relates to how you perceive coaching and I am asking you to consider your response using metaphor. If coaching were a season, which season would it be?'
- P23: 'Autumn.'
- R24: 'And what connections do you make between autumn and coaching?'
- P24: 'Well I said that really quickly without any reflection, I think it is about preparing the ground, you know that period of regeneration.'
- R25: 'And to what extent is that your experience of coaching?'
- P25: 'I think it must be, although I had never thought of this. I do experience coachees as tired and in need to regeneration, so that is influencing my choice but if I stick with the coaching process I do see it as a fallow period. And now I think that is a contradiction because things happen in the coaching process but maybe it is that coaching is preparation for growth.'
- R26: 'If you were to describe yourself as a season, which season would you be?'
- P26: 'Summer.'
- R27: 'What connections do you make between yourself as a coach and summer?'

- P27: 'Light and clarity. I think that is what I bring?'
- R28: 'If I were to see you work as a coach, what would I see you doing that would cause me to notice that you were that season?'
- P28: 'I said summer because I exude warmth and acceptance; there is a calmness to me, you know no storms or bad weather. So what you would see me doing is being present; staying connected; being calm. I would be feeding the coachee, nourishing through listening, reflecting and questioning'
- R28: 'How might how your experience of yourself influence your work as a coach?'
- P28: 'I am feeling a little big-headed as I listen to myself, I hope it influences me in a positive way, actually I am sure it does.'
- R29: 'If I asked you to describe the organisation using the metaphor of a season, what would you say?'
- P29: 'Winter; the organisation is a dark place that is lacking in growth'
- R30: 'What is it like for you to have a professional relationship with an organisation that you experience as winter?'
- P30: 'For me it is about acceptance, every organisation has a feel to it; I just accept that as a truth, if the coachee brings it up I work with what is going on for them.'
- R31: 'How might your experience of the organisation as winter influence your work as a coach?'
- P31: 'My experience of the organisation could be different from the coachee; we don't talk about my experience, we talk about their experience. I don't think my experience of the organisation has any impact on my work.'
- R32: 'In your experience of the coachees that you have worked with, generally, what season would you say they are?'
- P32: 'In the recent past, the last year, I would say winter (Sighs).'
- R33: 'And you sighed as you said that.'

P33: 'Did I? I didn't notice.'

R34: 'And what is it about these coachees that caused you to experience as them winter'

P34: 'I am perhaps being influenced by the work I have done in the last year, which has been a time of huge change. That sounds bleak when I say it, it is not meant to. I experience them as closing down and doing what they have to do to survive.'

R35: 'So what is it like for you to work with these coachees?'

P35: 'Well, I said winter and that is true for me; it is not that they are cold or dark, there is a dullness, you know like they have lost their edge.'

R36: 'What is it like for you to work with coachees that you experience as winter?'

P36: 'That sounds negative; it is not mean to be because the people I work with have all been willing to go with the process and to genuinely engage. I have to keep myself upbeat because I think it could get me down.'

R37: 'How might your experience of them influence your work as a coach?'

P37: 'I want to say it doesn't, but I do notice I am tired after coaching sessions and I think your research is going to prove that all of this does have an impact.'

R38: 'I am wondering if there is anything more you want to say about that.'

P38: 'No I don't think so; I am not scared I just think I am going to find out some things that I didn't know about myself and my work.'

R39: 'So if you are not scared what are you feeling?'

P39: 'Really, truthfully, I do feel a little scared but mostly I just feel curious.'

R40: 'I am wondering if we need to talk more about the research process and how you feel?'

P40: 'I appreciate you asking that but I don't feel the need to talk any more about it and if I do I will say?'

- R41: 'Thinking about the sponsors you contract with which season would you use to describe them?'
- P41: 'I would say spring.'
- R42: 'What is it about your experience of them that caused you to choose the season you did?'
- P44: 'It is interesting because it seems like a contradiction given what I have said about the coachees and the organisation, but I get a sense of hope and growth from the managers when they come to the process.'
- R43: 'And what it is like for you to contract with sponsors you experience as spring?'
- P43: 'When I describe them as spring, I find them easier to work with them to get a contract; they are more helpful and I get a sense that coaching is seen as a positive intervention rather than the last hope because they don't know what to do.'
- R44: 'How might your experience of the sponsors influence your work as a coach?'
- P44: 'I don't know the answer to that question because I haven't thought like this before, thinking about it now, though, I think maybe I am bolder in my challenge because I feel supported by the sponsor.'
- R45: 'So thinking about the contracting process your experience of the coachee and the sponsor how does that manifest itself behaviourally?'
- P45: 'I am experiencing the coachees as winter and the sponsors as spring and I get a sense of frustration from the sponsors that the coachees are not growing fast enough; I pick up desperation from the sponsor.'
- R46: 'And how might that experience impact on how you work in the contracting session?'
- P46: 'These questions are pushing me to honest reflection and I think I am drawn to the person who is more positive and I can become irritated in the face of negativity and I have to pay attention to how I deal with that.'

- R47: 'How might your experience in the contracting session influence your work in as a coach?'
- P47: 'I have never considered that it does, in my coach training, we are taught to keep the process clean and take any challenges or issues to supervision.'
- R48: 'How might your perceptions influence your work?'
- P48: 'I am very aware and notice my reaction so that I can put them to one side.'
- R49: 'So thank you for your input, that as far as we take it today, but before we finish what else do you want to say?'
- P49: 'I thought I was a reflective practitioner, but I feel pushed to deeper reflection than before.'
- R50: 'And how is that for you?'
- P50: 'Challenging but okay, actually.'

Second stage interview – using symbolic representation

- R1: 'Thanks for continuing to take part in the research, before we start; I am wondering if there is anything we need to talk about?'
- P1: 'Getting a copy of the transcript and the recording was really useful. I reflected on what came out of the session and had some supervision on how I see myself as a coach. There is nothing for us to talk about; I just wanted to let you know that it helped my reflections.'
- R2: 'Today the focus is the same, so looking at you, the coachee, the sponsor, the organisation and the coaching process, although in the context of one relationship that you are willing to explore. The process today is that I will invite you to reflect working with symbols. I remember when we spoke about this, you said it wasn't a method that is familiar to you.'
- P2: 'No it isn't, but I am keen to experience it.'
- R3: 'What questions do you have about the method?'

- P3: 'None, I think I would rather experience it.'
- R4: 'So look at the toys in front of you and when you are ready choose a toy that represents how you experience yourself as a coach in that relationship. Notice what you are drawn to and don't overthink your choice.'
- P4: 'I choose the helicopter. I like to think of myself as above the situation, you know, seeing it from all angles and shining my lights on the situation.'
- R5: 'So I hear you already starting to connect with characteristics of the toy and as you continue to hold the helicopter in what way do you experience yourself as similar to it?'
- P5: 'I'm feeling quite a strong connection to the helicopter, and I think it is as simple as having a bird's eye view, you know I am in the eye in the sky, paying attention to all that is going on.'
- R6: 'What does that mean for you as a coach in this relationship?'
- P6: 'Hmmm, I like to think that I am connected to all the pieces, you know the parties to the relationship but I am not in the middle of it.'
- R7: 'So, if you are not in the middle of it, where are you?'
- P7: 'I keep coming back to being above it and I don't like when I hear myself say that.'
- R8: 'What is it you don't like about it?'
- P8: 'I get a sense of being distant, and I think I am a bit distant, you know I don't want to get too close or too familiar. Then I think that makes me sound cold and I am not a cold person. I said I was summer last time when you used seasons. This is making me think.'
- R9: 'What is it you are thinking about?'
- P9: 'Well, I am wondering if the coachee experiences me as cold or warm.'
- R10: 'And it sounds as though you see those as either or.'

- P10: 'Yes I am, I want to put the helicopter back and choose something else, but I think I would be kidding myself.'
- R11: 'So what do you want to do?'
- P11: 'Stick with it.'
- R12: 'What other characteristics does the helicopter have that fit with how you experience yourself as a coach?'
- P12: 'Well it is powerful, it can travel quite far, and it takes passengers.'
- R13: 'And what does it mean for you to be powerful, able to travel far and take passengers in this coaching relationship.'
- P13: 'I am powerful, coaching is powerful, but now I am mixing up myself with the coaching process (smiles).'
- R14: 'And you smile when you say that.'
- P14: 'Yes and that was a smile of insight. I tend to think of power as negative, so I switch the focus from me to the coaching process.'
- R15: 'What does it mean for you to be powerful in this relationship?'
- P15: 'It is hard for me to accept that I am powerful, because I see power as a negative characteristic, but I am powerful in this relationship, I am taken seriously, I am listened to and I am influential. And when I say influential that sits better with me.'
- R16: 'Going back to the other characteristics you mentioned, the ability to travel far and take passengers what do these mean for you?'
- P16: 'I like the idea of being able to travel far because that is how I feel about the work I am doing with this coachee. He has really travelled quite a distance since we started together, and I have influenced that journey because of how I work with him.'
- R17: 'And in relation to taking passengers?'

- P17: 'Right now, I think I am taking passengers in this relationship, the sponsor and the organisation, they are not really involved.'
- R18: 'So staying with your experience of yourself in this relationship, what is it like for you to take passengers?'
- P18: 'It feels surprisingly easy and I am uncomfortable when I say that.'
- R19: 'What is the discomfort?'
- P19: 'I think I am taking too much responsibility.'
- R20: 'What does it mean for you to take too much responsibility?'
- P20: 'Hard. Yeah tough, it's tough for me to acknowledge that.'
- R21: 'If I heard you correctly, you said that it was tough for you to acknowledge you take too much responsibility. How is it for you to take too much responsibility?'
- P21: (Laughs) 'Oh it is easy to take too much responsibility; that is what I do, eldest child in the family, always taking care of the little ones.'
- R22: 'I noticed you laughed before you answered that last question.'
- P22: 'I think it is getting an insight that I am doing in this relationship what I do in personal relationships. Now I am wondering if I do it more that I think in my professional relationship.'
- R23: 'Given what has emerged as you have reflected on yourself, how might this be impacting on your work as a coach?'
- P23: 'Right now, I don't know. I have realised just from looking at myself that I am taking too much responsibility in this relationship, but I don't really know what that means. I guess I want to reflect on other coaching relationships and notice if there are similarities and differences.'
- R24: 'And our focus today is on the one relationship you chose to explore, so it would not be appropriate in the context of the research to invite you to do that reflecting today, so I am wondering what you want to do next?'

- P24: 'I will reflect outside of this conversation.'
- R25: 'Is it okay to move on?'
- P25: 'Yeah, I am ready to find out more.'
- R26: 'So please choose a symbol to represent your coachee and how you experience them in the coaching relationship.'
- P26: 'The soldier.'
- R27: 'In what way do you experience this person as a similar to the soldier?'
- P27: 'In two ways, I suppose. Sometimes he is just soldiering one and other times he is in battle.'
- R28: 'What does it mean for you to experience this person as soldiering on?'
- P28: 'He seems to be resigned to things, well that was a bit more in the early session. He just kept going, not expecting things to get better, almost accepting this is how it is and has to be.'
- R29: 'And how might that be influencing your work with him?'
- P29: 'Oh, that comes back to responsibility and the passenger thing I mentioned earlier. Yes (energised) that makes absolute sense when I think about it. I think the soldiering on was connected to him being a passenger in the early part of the process and I think I was working harder than he was. And that means I was taking more responsibility than was mine to take.'
- R30: 'And I heard you mention another experience of him as a soldier, you said he was in a battle.'
- P30: 'Well, that was what emerged part way through the sessions; I experienced him as going from one extreme to another. You know from sort of being resigned to being ready to go to war.'
- R31: 'And I notice you have changed your description from battle to war.'

- P31: 'I did. Hmm. It was more than a battle, more strategic than that. There was a bigger plan but somebody was going to get hurt. I remember picking up on his language which reflected war.'
- R32: 'How might that be impacting on your work with him?'
- P32: 'I am not sure, I think it did but it is hard to think back to the situation. Although I do remember feeling scared on his behalf.'
- R33: 'And how might that have impacted on the work you did with him?'
- P33: 'I don't know this for certain, but I think I may have influenced him to make different choices. I am fairly sure I must have.'
- R34: 'And you said you felt scared on his behalf, how did you feel in the relationship?'
- P34: 'I felt scared.'
- R35: 'And how might that have impacted on how you worked with him?'
- P35: 'Well, I know I never said this to him, so I think I avoided something?'
- R36: 'What might you have been avoiding?'
- P36: 'Challenging him. As I talk about this, I think my fear of conflict perhaps got in the way of the work because he spoke about being in a conflict zone.'
- R37: 'And how might that have impacted on your work with him?'
- P37: 'I keep saying, I don't know and I think I might be avoiding, but I can't think of another answer.'
- R38: 'So let's go with you not knowing right now.'
- P38: 'I felt relieved when you said that.'
- R39: 'So, notice if you are ready to choose a symbol to represent the sponsor.'
- P39: 'I want to choose the pirate.'

- R40: 'And yet you haven't picked the pirate up.'
- P40: 'Because I know you are going to ask me to explore that and I feel bad about how I feel.'
- R41: 'So what are you choosing?'
- P41: (Picks up the pirate) 'Yes she is the pirate.'
- R42: 'As you hold the symbol in your hand, in what way do you experience the sponsor as similar to the pirate?'
- P42: 'Actually I like the pirate as a way of describing my experience of this sponsor; it sounds like a bit of cliché but she seems to be permanently on the hunt for buried treasure, but she doesn't show anybody the map, maybe there is no map?'
- R43: 'What is it like for you to work with a sponsor that is permanently on the hunt for buried treasure?'
- P43: 'Well I think she knows there is something somewhere than can be found and it will be great, like the buried treasure, but it as though she holds back information that would be helpful to get to the treasure. Sorry that was a bit long-winded.'
- R44: 'I suggest you just go with your process. So what is it like for you to work with someone like that?'
- P44: 'Tough. It's tough. In the contracting session and mid-point review, I never got a sense of really understanding what her expectations are.'
- R45: 'And how might this be influencing your work?'
- P45: 'Well the same theme comes up again – responsibility. I think I took on responsibility for finding the buried treasure, which is a metaphor for the inherent potential in the coachee. I didn't push her on desired outcomes and her role in the process. I think that is maybe why I said earlier that I experienced the sponsor and the organisation as passengers.'
- R46: 'How might this be impacting on your relationships?'

- P46: 'I think I lose sight of the sponsor. So I guess that means I feel closer to the coachee. Not in a collusive way.'
- R47: 'Notice your thoughts and feelings as you reflect on this and say anything else that comes up for you.'
- P47: 'I am shocked that I can see this now and yet I didn't see it at the time. I can remember being uncomfortable at certain points but I didn't spend a lot of time reflecting on my discomfort. I was between supervisors at the time and in peer supervision, so I wasn't perhaps being challenged enough on my own reflective process.'
- R48: 'You said you are shocked and I am wondering if there us anything you need to do with that.'
- P48: 'I don't think so, I am shocked but I am not being hard on myself.'
- R48: 'Is it okay to move on?'
- P49: 'Yes. I am guessing you what me to look at a symbol for the organisation now.'
- R50: 'That's right. When you are ready choose a symbol that represents how you experience the organisation.'
- P50: 'The bulldozer.'
- R51: 'In what way do you experience the organisation as similar to a bulldozer?'
- P51: 'It is a bulldozer, full throttle, nothing stopping it, and woe betide anything that gets in its way.'
- R52: 'What is it like for you to work with an organisation that you experience as a bulldozer?'
- P52: 'I feel awkward saying this about the organisation because I think the people at the top are doing what they believe they have to do.'
- R53: 'I noticed that you seemed to choose the bulldozer fairly quickly and I am wondering what drew you to it?'

- P53: 'Because that is my experience and that is what you asked for.'
- R54: 'So, in accepting that as your truth, what happened when I asked what it was like to work with an organisation that you experience as a bulldozer?'
- P54: 'I felt awkward and I suppose I am censoring myself.'
- R55: 'So. what do you want to do?'
- P55: 'Stay with the bulldozer.'
- R56: 'What is it like for you to work with an organisation that you experience as a bulldozer?'
- P56: 'Actually, when I think about it, I like the idea of it clearing rubbish out of the way and preparing the ground for something better. And I can see that, but my experience is that the bulldozer is almost out of control, it's knocking people out of the way, it is going too fast and, honestly, I am a little scared about being in the way.'
- R57: 'What does it mean for you to be in the way?'
- P57: 'Not doing work that is seen to support the organisation and its goals.'
- R58: 'So what scares you in that experience?'
- P58: 'It is basic survival, I might not survive in this organisation, people aren't.'
- R59: 'How might that be influencing your work as a coach?'
- P59: 'You must be sick of me saying I don't know. But I don't know, maybe I am protecting the coachee. I experienced the organisation as a passenger in the coaching process, so I am struggling to square how it can be a passenger and a bulldozer.'
- R60: 'What is the struggle?'
- P60: 'My need to make connections, pull things together into a coherent whole, instead of just going with the flow. So what if there are contradictions?' (sighs)

R61: 'You sigh as you say that.'

P61: 'Yes it is a familiar pattern.'

R62: 'This is about your experience; what would help you right now to go with the flow.'

P62: 'To stop judging myself for how I experience the organisation. I am taking all the responsibility. (laughs) Oh, I am back to that again.'

R63: 'What would help you to stop judging yourself?'

P63: 'To remind myself that you are not judging me.'

R64: 'I am not judging you.'

P64: 'Thanks.'

R65: 'What is it like for you to work with an organisation that you experience as a bulldozer?'

P65: 'I feel like the person who comes along in the wake of the bulldozer and clears things up?'

R65: 'And how might that be influencing your work as a coach?'

P65: 'I think it does but other than taking more responsibility than I should I don't know and maybe the impact will come out as we do more of these interviews.'

R66: 'How might this impact your relationships?'

P66: 'I think this impact might be that I see this as a two person relationship, because there are only two of us doing the work?'

R67: So finally please choose a symbol which represents how you are experiencing the coaching process.

P67: 'The wizard.'

R68: 'In what way do you experience the coaching process as similar to the wizard?'

P68: 'There is a magical element to the process.'

R69: 'What does that mean for you?'

P69: 'This might sound conceited, it's not meant to. But the process is more than just questioning and listening and reflecting; something happens some of the time that I can't quite put my finger on.'

R70: 'So it is more than questioning, listening and reflecting. What more is it?'

P70: 'It is like there are a number of potions that go into the pot, a chemical reaction and something wonderful appears.'

R71: 'How might your experience of the coaching process be influencing your work?'

P71: 'I don't want to think about that really, it there is a magic created in the process I don't want to analyse it.'

R72: 'So, if you give me a reflection rather than an analysis what would you say?'

P72: 'It influences my work in a positive way, alchemy comes to mind.'

R73: 'How might this impact your relationships?'

P73: 'I come back to maybe I am ignoring the organisation and the line manager. Enjoying the chemistry of the coaching process.'

R74: 'I'd like to move on but before we do, I am wondering if there is anything else you want to say?'

P74: 'I'd like to move on and I can't think of anything to say.'

R75: 'So looking at the symbols in front of you I would like you to arrange them in such a way as to represent how you experience the relationships. I know you are familiar with the concept of group imago, so I am asking you to develop your imago.'

The participant arranged the imago with the coachee (soldier) in the centre of the relationship lying down rather than standing; the sponsor (pirate) is off to the right and

facing away from the coachee, also lying down rather than standing; the organisation (bulldozer) is some distance away and facing forward. The coach (helicopter) is hovering about the coachee and moves out to land by the sponsor.

R76: 'And what is your reaction when you look at this?'

P76: 'It is an interesting picture but I am on the ground rather than hovering above the situation.'

R77: 'And what is emerging for you as you notice that?'

P77: 'Well I feel like a rescue helicopter.'

R78: 'And what does that mean for you?'

P78: 'Hard as it is to acknowledge this, I think it means that I am taking on the role of rescuing.'

R79: 'And how might that have influenced your work?'

P79: 'Em, responsibility again! I am setting myself up to rescue and take responsibility.'

R80: 'And what do you notice about the other characters in the scene?'

P81: 'I notice the coachee and the sponsor have either been knocked over or have fallen over?'

R82: 'And what meaning are you making from that?'

P82: 'Well looking at the bulldozer, the meaning I take right now is that they have been knocked over by the bulldozer and I am on a rescue mission.'

R83: 'What else, if anything, do you notice.'

P83: 'I am wondering about the significance of the size of me, I am the biggest symbol in the imago.'

R84: 'And what meaning are you making from that?'

- P85: 'I see myself as a big player in the process and bigger than the organisation.'
- R86: 'And how might that influence on your work?'
- P86: 'Well I am wondering if I am taking on the organisation; notice how I go back and forward between the coachee and sponsor, it is almost as though I am taking care of both of them.'
- R87: 'As you look at the imago how true is this picture to your experience?'
- P88: 'I think it is very true, I can feel it.'
- R89: 'And as you look at this imago, how does it fit with your purpose in coaching?'
- P89: 'Well it doesn't, not at all. It is quite stark really.'
- R90: 'What are you experiencing now?'
- P90: 'Fear, this picture is so far away from what I think I do that I am questioning my own competence.'
- R91: 'I hear that fear is prevalent for you and I want to remind you that this research is not about your competence.'
- P91: 'Thanks for that reminder.'
- R92: 'What are you noticing from this imago about authority in this relationship?'
- P92: 'I am taking an authority role.'
- R93: 'What are you noticing about power?'
- P93: 'That the two most powerful players are me and the organisation. I think it is me against the organisation. Or me cleaning up after the organisation.'
- R94: 'As you look at this imago, what are you accountable for?'
- P94: 'Making things better.'

- R95: 'And what emotional resources are you using in this imago?'
- P95: 'A lot of energy, positive energy though. I am keeping spirits up.'
- R96: 'As you reflect on the relationships in the coaching process, how might these be influenced by your unconscious mind?'
- P96: 'At this stage I just know they are, I don't really know how they are, but if this stuff is going on under the surface, it must be coming out in the way I work.'
- R97: 'How are you experiencing your emerging story?'
- P97: 'Well I feel uncomfortable.'
- R98: 'What is causing the discomfort?'
- P98: 'The dawning that so much is going on that I wasn't aware of moment by moment.'
- R99: 'So what is your experience of your emerging story?'
- P99: 'It is enlightening and frightening. But it is good at both levels; it can only serve to make me a better coach.'
- R100: 'We are coming to the end of the session and I want to give you a few minutes to reflect to check if there is anything else you want to say.'
- P100: 'I am exhausted; I found that quite intense but not in a bad way. It has made me think about the coaching process and how intense that might be for the coachee.'
- R101: 'Notice if there is anything that has emerged today that you would like to leave behind.'
- P102: (Laughs) 'Absolutely not, I am taking all of what has come up away with me. Will I get a copy of the recording and the transcript?'
- R103: 'Yes and you will get that in before our next session.'

Third stage interview – indirect observation.

R1: 'Thanks for continuing to take part in this process. Before we start, I am wondering if there is anything from last time we need to talk about.'

P1: 'No, I don't think there is. I have done a lot of reflecting since we last met and I found it really useful to listen to the recording. Interestingly, I noticed that there wasn't a thing I wished I hadn't said, or anything that I would have said differently. Well, maybe I would have liked to use I don't know less often that I did.'

R2: 'In terms of how we work today, I suggest you recreate your imago and then we listen to the recording. At any point in the recording you notice something about your interaction, press the pause button and I will invite you to reflect. How does that sound?'

P2: 'I did listen to the recording this morning in preparation for the session and I noticed a few things, so it will be interesting to see if there is anything else that comes up.'

R3: 'Please recreate your imago when you are ready.'

P3: 'I think I can remember. May I should say that when I listened to the recording of the coaching session, the coachee had moved past being resigned and soldiering on and was much more at the stage of preparing for war.'

We listen to the recording and the participant pauses the recording at 5:21.

R4: 'So what happened there that you want to reflect on?'

P4: 'The coachee is telling me a story about what has been happening since we last met and it's to do with how he is fighting back against the organisation. I interrupt him twice when he is speaking.'

R5: 'So what do you remember thinking or feeling at the time?'

P5: 'Scared, look at the expression on my face and listen to my voice.'

R6: 'What do you see in your face and hear in your voice?'

- P6: 'I see terror in my face and my voice tone and tempo changes; it is a higher pitch and must faster than I usually speak?'
- R7: 'As you reflect now what do you think was going on at the time?'
- P7: 'Two things: I think I was scared when I heard his negativity about the organisation and how he is taking senior people on, that is his language. And the other thing is I feel I am not doing my job for the organisation.'
- R8: 'What changes in your imago?'
- P8: 'Well, he is standing up and is moving in front of the bulldozer and the sponsor is out of the picture, well not quite out but at the edge.'
- R9: 'And what about you?'
- P9: 'I am chasing after him; but I am not flying, I am lumbering along on the ground.'
- R10: 'You are a helicopter, what is stopping you from flying?'
- P10: 'I can't get my motor started.'
- R11: 'What is stopping you?'
- P11: 'I am not thinking straight, the routine things I do are not working.'
- R12: 'How true a reflection is that of how you are experiencing yourself in that moment?'
- P12: 'It absolutely is.'
- R13: 'And in moving those three characters, how does that impact on the organisation?'
- P13: 'I don't think it has yet, no impact yet, but I think there will be and that is influencing how I am with the coachee?'
- R14: 'And what are you noticing about how you are with the coachee terms of influencing how you work with him?'

P14: 'I am restraining him; I think that is what the interrupting is about and the question I ask him seems a bit loaded.'

R15: 'How are you feeling about the sponsor at this point?'

P15: 'I feel abandoned by him; he is out of the picture and I am left to restrain this coachee.'

R16: 'And how are you feeling about the organisation at this point?'

P16: 'Worried but more on behalf of the coachee than myself; I am worried they won't see him until it is too late?'

R17: 'And how might that have impacted on the work you are doing with the him?'

P17: 'I am assuming he needs restrained and I am not working to help him think through what is going on for him, I am working with my fantasy.'

R18: 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'

P18: 'Passively aggressive in terms of trying to control the coachee for his own good.'

R19: 'How is what you are noticing impacting on you in the session?'

P19: 'I think I am being quite controlling, I am not following his flow; I am trying to stop him.'

We listen to the recording and the participant pauses at 11.59.

R19: 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?'

P19: 'I got even more controlling, like a parent yelling at a kid not to run on to the road.'

R20: 'What changes in your imago?'

P20: 'The bulldozer has turned around and it is coming towards him.'

R21: 'And what else changes as a result of that?'

P21: 'I stop being a helicopter and I become a jaguar, I rush in and pull him away from the bulldozer. I am just going to put the jaguar in'

R22: 'So you move from lumbering along the ground to reacting with speed?'

P22: 'It is what I say in the moment as much as how I say it. I imply danger in my question (How might you be putting yourself in danger by doing that?) and the coachee has never mentioned danger. The words rush out of my mouth and I am out of kilter with him, he is quite laid back. Can we listen to his reply?'

We re-start the recording.

R23: 'So what happens when he answers?'

P23: 'I ignore the fact that he sees no danger and stay with my thoughts.'

R24: 'How are you feeling about the coachee at this point?'

P24: 'I feel frustrated that he can't see the danger he is in?'

R25: 'And the other parties to the relationship, how do you feel about them at this point?'

P25: 'I only see me, the coachee and the organisation; the sponsor is not on my mind.'

R26: 'And how might this have impacted on the work you are doing with him?'

P26: 'Well, he is ignoring his sponsor and so am I so there are only three parties in the relationship at this point. I think I am unconsciously giving him permission to ignore the sponsor.'

R27: 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'

P27: 'Desperate – I sound a bit desperate. I think it gets better though.'

R28: 'How is what you are noticing impacting on your work?'

P28: 'I think I am unconsciously focussed on getting him to see things my way. Well it is unconscious; I would not do that with awareness. It tells me something about the relationship though.'

R29: 'What does it tell you about the relationship?'

P29: 'Well in that moment I am ignoring the role of the sponsor and I am trying to protect the coachee from the organisation.'

We continue to listen to the recording at pause at 17.23.

R30: 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?'

P30: 'I bring in the sponsor at this stage?'

R31: 'What changes in the imago?'

P31: 'The sponsor is back in the picture front and centre and standing alongside the coachee. And the bulldozer is off to the front and forging ahead again?'

R32: 'So what caused that shift in the imago?'

P32: 'Honestly, I think I remembered the sponsor at this stage and I don't know what prompted it. My voice tone and tempo changes as does my line of questioning. I become more challenging at this point and let go of trying to rescue him.'

R33: 'And what about the organisation, the bulldozer is out in front again?'

P33: 'Well yes, the coachee is not in danger now, or at least that is my perception. Interesting that I didn't accept that he wasn't in danger until that point.'

R34: 'How are you feeling about the parties to the relationship at that point?'

P34: 'More relaxed and more in tune with the coachee and the sponsor, I let go of my agenda. It is probably my fear of danger that I was projecting on to him. The organisation is in the picture and I am aware of it but not impacted by it.'

R35: 'And how might this have impacted on your work?'

P35: 'I think I got back to coaching as it should be at this point?'

R37: 'And how might that have impacted on the work you were doing at the time?'

P37: 'I think it freed both of us up to work together more effectively.'

R38: 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'

P38: 'More confident and more relaxed, at peace in the session.'

R39: 'How is what you are noticing impacting on your work?'

P39: 'Positively, it is as though started to trust the coachee, my challenge became cleaner and stronger, and I was no longer driven to rescue.'

We continue to listen to the recording and pause at 24.10.

R40: 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?'

P40: 'I use direct communication and challenge him on his future actions and I think he got defensive when I asked that question and the soldier seemed to see me as the enemy. I held my ground here but not in an aggressive way.'

R41: 'So what relevance are you grasping now that you didn't then?'

P41: 'His language, he is back to preparing for war; he said that his sponsor makes the bullets for him to fire; it is like being in a war zone; and he better get his flak jacket on before he goes back to work. I challenged all of that in quite a forceful way but the relevance now is that he is the soldier off to war again.'

R42: 'What changes in the imago?'

P42: 'The sponsor is way off to the side again and the coachee is moving forward following the bulldozer.'

R43: 'What caused the shift in the imago?'

P43: 'I am picking up that he doesn't feel supported by his boss and I realised that at the time but I didn't say anything.'

R44: 'What else shifted in the imago as a result of that realisation?'

P44: 'I am moving myself in front of him and I am back to being the helicopter again, circling around the scene.'

R45: 'How are you feeling about the parties to the relationship at this point in the session?'

P45: 'A little anxious for the coachee but only because I think he sees danger for himself. You know I pick up the language he used.'

R46: 'And how might this have impacted on the work you were doing in the session?'

P46: 'I think for a few moments I moved back into protecting him, just by the nature of the questions I was asking.'

R47: 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'

P47: 'I didn't notice it at the time but I right now I feel a bit scared because I think he is a bit scared.'

R48: 'How might that have impacted on the session?'

P48: 'Right then I think it is holding us and the process back. Can we listen to the next bit?'

We restart the recording and pause at 28.15.

R49: 'What happened there that you want to reflect on?'

P49: 'Something shifted for me and I was able to say what I was feeling?'

R50: 'What changes in the imago?'

P50: 'I am right alongside the coachee but the propellers aren't whirring, so he can hear me without me shouting.'

R51: 'What caused the shift?'

P51: 'I relaxed and switched of the engine, metaphorically, and that allowed me to tell him I noticed his language and helped him to work through his thinking. He mentions that the next steps seem dangerous.'

R52: 'How are you experiencing yourself as you listen to your work?'

P52: 'Relaxed, I think I had really relaxed by this point.'

R53: 'How is what you are noticing impacting on your work?'

P53: 'I think my relaxed way of asking the questions, help him to relax.'

We listen to the remaining few minutes of the recording without pausing.

R54: 'What happened to your imago in the last few minutes of the recording?'

P55: 'It didn't change in the last few minutes of the recording and there is food for thought in that. I am interested to reflect on what that means going into the remaining sessions.'

R56: 'After listening to the recording, reflecting and reviewing your imago what are you noticing about authority in this relationship?'

P56: 'It shifts and changes in a short space of time, and I don't think about it when reflecting on my work, I assume it is an equal relationship. I think I am in a bit of a power struggle with the organisation and in this session with the coachee, particularly when he sees no danger and I do.'

R57: 'What are you accountable for in this relationship?'

R57: 'It has become apparent that I hold myself more accountable for success than I should do. I contract for roles and responsibilities I haven't followed through on that. It might be the case in most of my work, that old chestnut of responsibility comes up again.'

R58: 'What emotional resources are you using in this relationship?'

P58: 'A whole range of them, but I have noticed that the emotion I am most in touch with is fear.'

- R59: 'How do you experience yourself as you say that?'
- P59: 'As though I have given myself permission to be human.'
- R60: 'What thoughts do you have about the impact of the unconscious mind on the coaching process?'
- P60: 'To be honest, I came in to this being a little sceptical but willing to give it a go. I leave knowing that there is a lot going on under the surface and I want to learn to pay more attention to that. If it is a happening to me, then it must be happening to the coachee too.'
- R61: 'We are coming to the end of the session, and I want to give you a few minutes to reflect to see if there is anything else you want to say.'
- P61: 'I have found this a challenging process but very enriching and I think it will have an impact on my work.'
- R61: 'Notice if there is anything that has emerged today that you want to get support with.'
- P62: 'I think there will be some things for supervision, I am a reflector, so I will do a bit of reflecting first.'
- R63: We have a date in the diary for a post-research interview session, so I will see you then.